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THE NEW YORKER

FEB. 2, 2009

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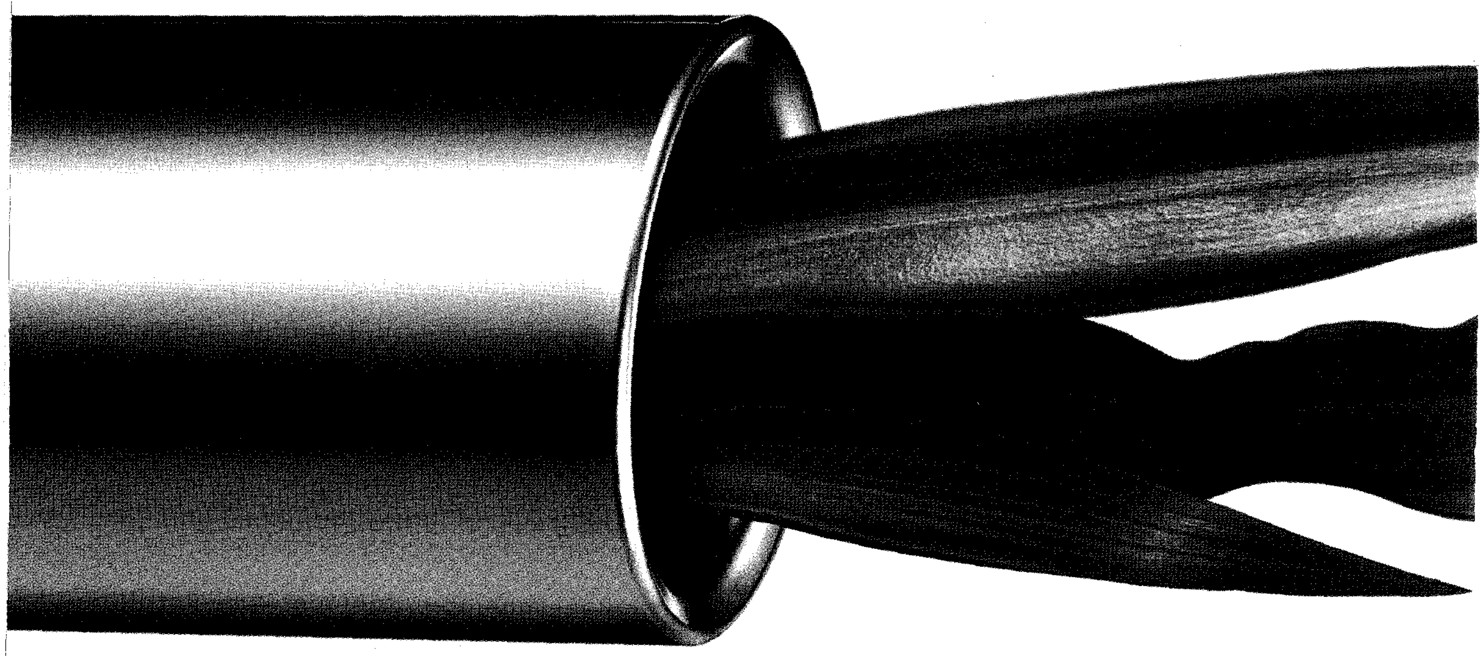

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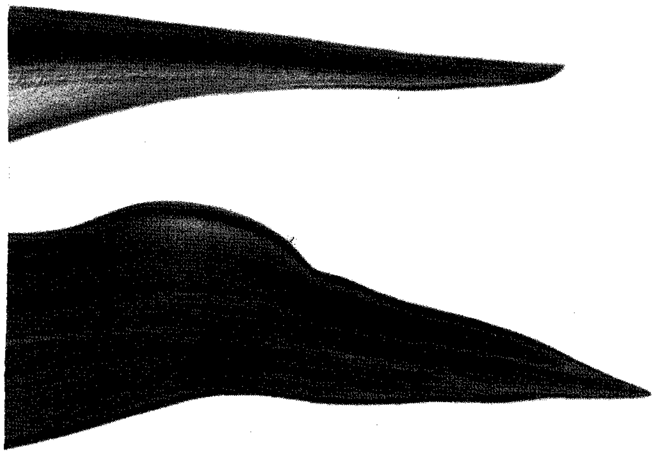

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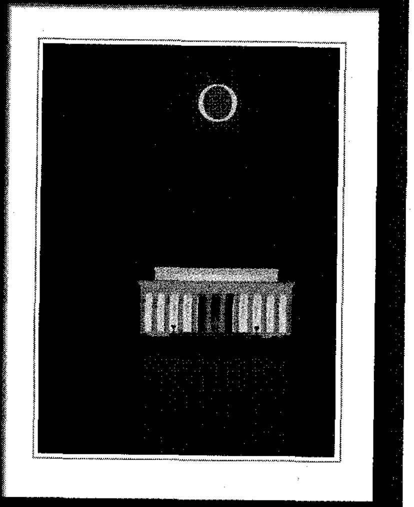
REFLECTION

by Bob Staake
Issue date: November 17, 2008



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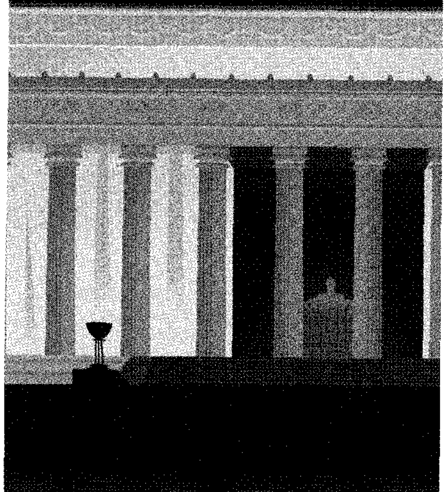

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CONTRIBUTORS

Laura Secor ("The Rationalist," p. 31) is a fellow at the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, at the New York Public Library, where she is working on a book about Iran.

Ta-Nehisi Coates (The Talk of the Town, p. 23), a contributing editor at *The Atlantic* and the Knobler Fellow at the Nation Institute, has just published his first book, "The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood."

Kelefa Sanneh ("The Wizard," p. 26) is a staff writer.

Barry Gifford (Poem, p. 32) has a new novel, "The Imagination of the Heart," the seventh and final book in the Sailor & Lula saga, which will be published in May.

Ben McGrath (The Talk of the Town, p. 25) is a staff writer.

Platon (Portfolio, p. 40), a staff photographer, received a first prize in the 2008 World Press Photo contest for his portrait of Vladimir Putin.

Adrian Tomine (Cover) is a writer and illustrator. A boxed set of his early work, "32 Stories," will be published in April.

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John Lanchester (Books, p. 70) won the 2008 E. M. Forster Award, given by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. "Family Romance," a memoir, is his most recent book.

Tom Sleigh (Poem, p. 58) teaches in the M.F.A. program at Hunter College. "Space Walk," a book of poems, won the 2008 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award.

Paul Goldberger (The Sky Line, p. 74), the magazine's architecture critic, has a new book, "Why Architecture Matters," coming out later this year.

Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 78) is the author of "The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century," for which he won a 2008 Guardian First Book Award.

John Lahr (The Theatre, p. 76), the magazine's senior drama critic and the author of "Honky Tonk Parade," is working on a book about Tennessee Williams.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
Audio: *Dorothy Wickenden* hosts a weekly conversation about politics. / *David Remnick* talks to the Israeli foreign minister, Tzipi Livni. / Video: *Paul Goldberger* looks at Lincoln Center's makeover. / *John Lahr* takes readers' questions about the theatre. / The Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, Goings On, plus blogs by *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *Steve Coll*, *George Packer*, *James Surowiecki*, and *Sasha Frere-Jones*. / From the archives: *Donald Malcolm* and *Diana Trilling* on the Kennedys, plus every issue back to 1925. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.

THE MAIL

ARENDT'S WORLD

Adam Kirsch describes Hannah Arendt's biography "Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess" as "a kind of orphan in the Arendt canon" (A Critic at Large, January 12th). Arendt wrote the first eleven chapters of the book in 1933, but it was published only in 1958, with the addition of a preface and two final chapters. Significantly, the preface mentions Varnhagen's inability "to use characteristics or opinions on . . . the circumstances and conditions of the world, on life itself, for purposes of shelter." More than simply a common usage of the term, "the world" connotes an important dimension of Arendt's political theory; namely, a space of plurality and debate necessary for public discourse. It is Varnhagen's worldlessness that connects the biography to other works published around that time. A central concept of "Men in Dark Times" (a collection of biographical sketches initially published in 1968) as well as of "The Human Condition" (first published in 1958), the world (or lack of one) gives "Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess" a proper home in Arendt's œuvre.

Noa Bar
West Hollywood, Calif.

FRANKLY SPEAKING

Jeffrey Toobin writes that Representative Barney Frank, the chairman of the House Committee on Financial Services, believes that "at the root of the real-estate crisis was a misguided notion that homeownership should be available to all people—what President Bush has called 'the ownership society'" ("Barney's Great Adventure," January 12th). I am not an economist, but Frank seems to be missing the point. In my estimation, the primary cause of the housing bubble was not that too many would-be homeowners bought property but that too many investors—sometimes known as speculators—bought property to flip at a profit. This fictitious demand drove up housing prices for those who purchased homes to actually live in. As a result, many homeowners who purchased homes at the peak of the bubble, at artificially inflated prices, currently owe more on their mortgages than their homes are worth, now that the bubble has burst. Frank seems to argue that homeownership is a fungible good that people can replace with home rental when prices are too high. But, instead of discouraging home ownership, a better solution would be to regulate the lenders that gave mortgages to speculators.

Ariel Kastner
Washington, D.C.

Toobin's Profile of my congressperson Barney Frank presents a mostly positive, and I think misleading, portrait of a politician whose reputation exceeds his accomplishments. Barney Frank likes to claim the mantle of his predecessor, the Reverend Robert Drinan. But Father Drinan was a man of great courage and conviction; he introduced the first impeachment resolution against Richard Nixon in 1973, for ordering the bombing of Cambodia (though it never made it out of committee). Frank chose to sit idly by while the exiting Chief Executive dismantled our Constitution in a way that makes Nixon look like a jaywalker. In sum, Barney Frank is all mumble, no rumble.

Mark S. Brodin
Newton, Mass.

CORRECTION: In "Lives of the Saints," by Jonathan Harr (January 5th), the U.S. Ambassador to Chad was described as having quit the country early in 2008 on a French military plane. In fact, he took refuge on a French military base in Chad.

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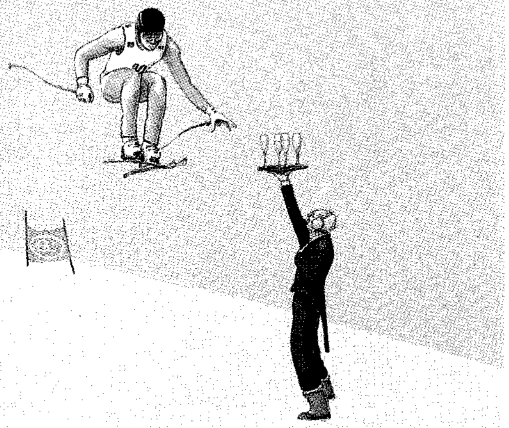
THE NEW YORKER ON THE SLOPES
AT BEAVER CREEK
FEBRUARY 26–28



Need a lift this winter? On February 26th, the *New Yorker* Promotion Department hits the slopes of Beaver Creek, Colorado, for three days of culture: comedy, cartoons, concerts, film previews, and, of course, superior skiing. With special guests and some of the magazine's most celebrated talent, it's certain to be the peak of your playtime this season.

COMEDIAN
MARTIN SHORT
"If I'd Saved, I Wouldn't Be Here"
Saturday, February 28

MUSICIAN
CHUCK MANGIONE
Friday, February 27

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Directed by: Daniel Barnz
Produced by: Ben Barnz
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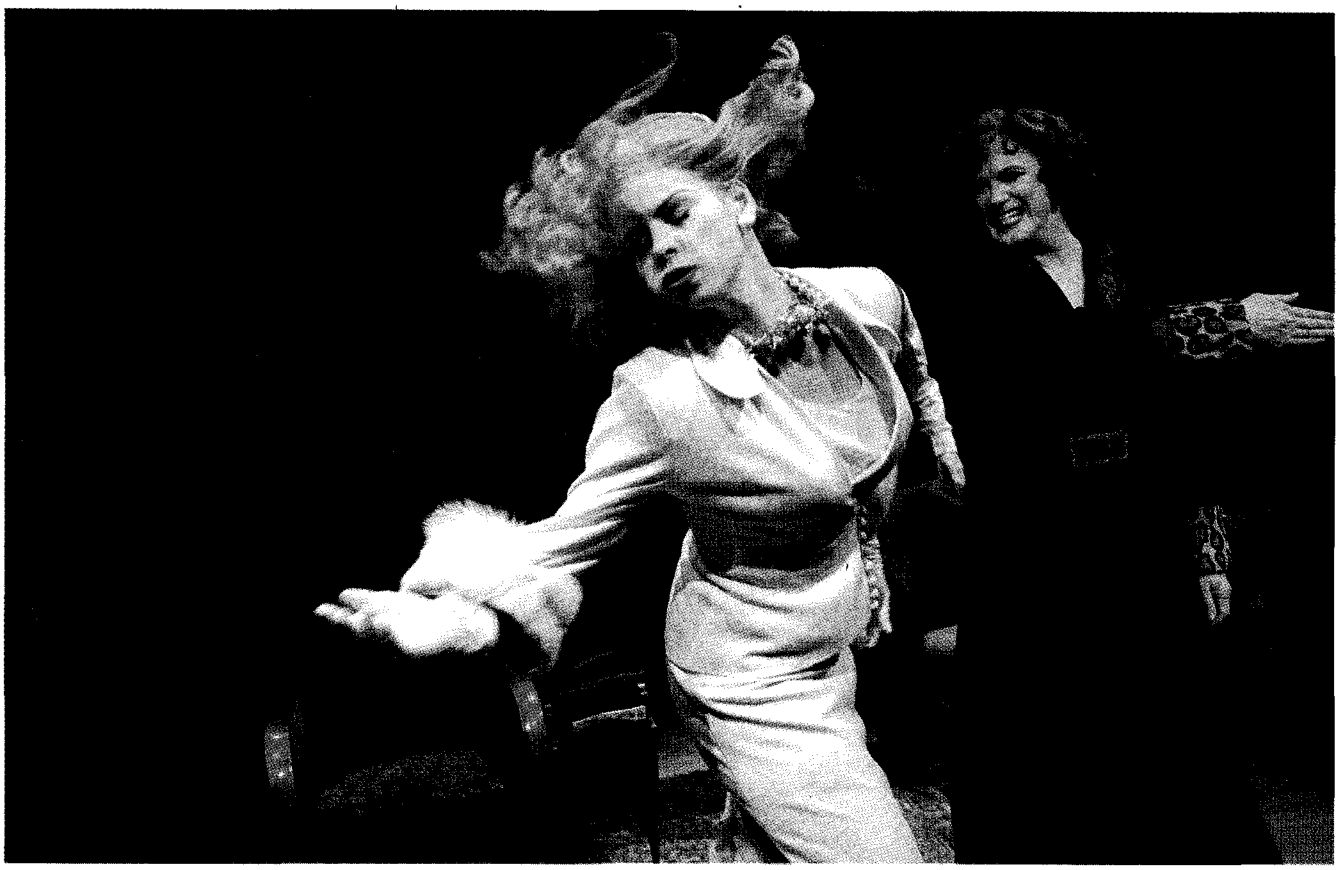


Charles Busch's "The Third Story," at MCC. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	28	29	30	31

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
PRAISE THE LORD

The Civilians, the intelligently entertaining downtown troupe behind the documentary musical "Gone Missing," now turn their attention to American evangelicals—specifically, the disgraced Colorado pastor Ted Haggard—in "This Beautiful City," a musical play that uses the text of actual interviews. The book is by the artistic director, Steven Cosson (who also directs), and Jim Lewis, with music and lyrics by Michael Friedman, at the Vineyard. (See page 9.)

NIGHT LIFE
GLASS HOUSE

The composer Philip Glass has pulled together a sparkling lineup for the annual Tibet House benefit concert, at Carnegie Hall. Steve Earle, Angelique Kidjo, the National, Patti Smith and her daughter Jesse, and Vampire Weekend are among the artists. (See page 10.)

ART
POST MASTER

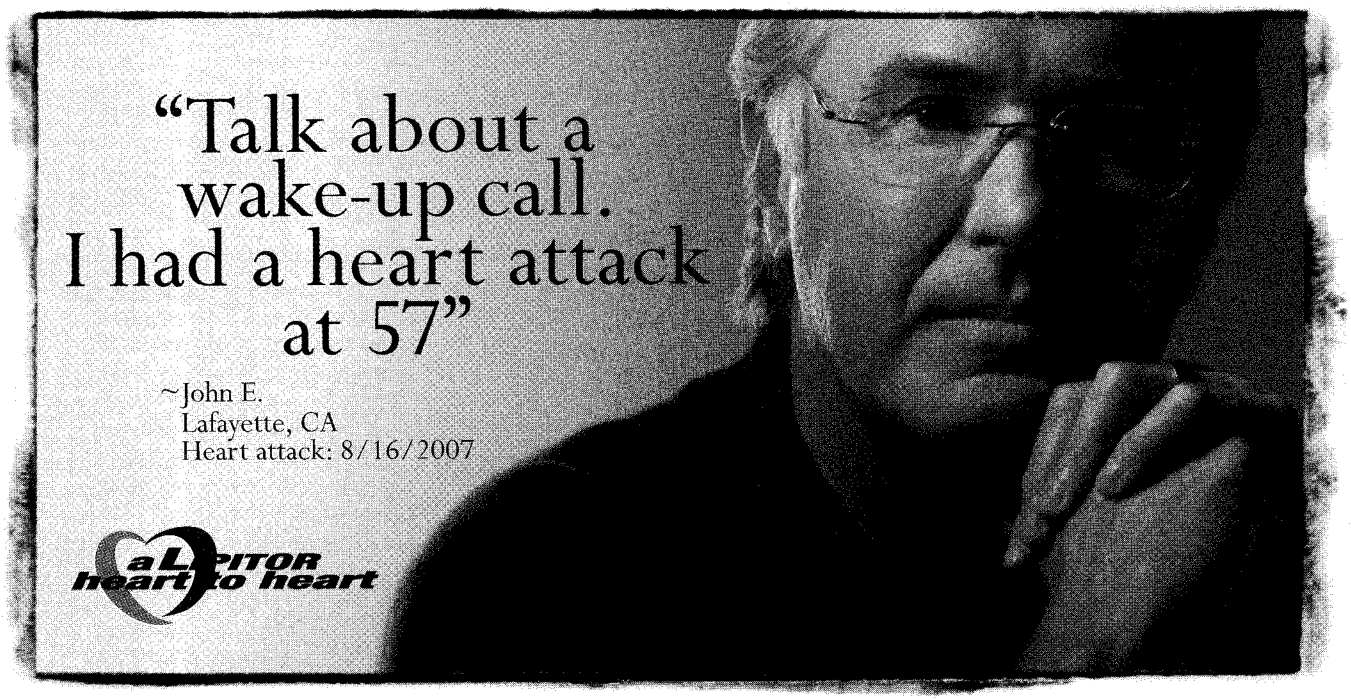
Walker Evans believed that "the eye traffics in feelings, not thoughts," so it's no surprise that he collected picture postcards, a form long on sentiment and short on prose. The Met will exhibit several hundred examples from the nine thousand in Evans's archive, alongside a dozen or so of his own photographs, printed on postcard-size paper. (See page 11.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CRYSTAL CLEAR

Juilliard's annual "Focus!" festival gives New Yorkers a chance to keep up with new music from around the world. This year features a major event: the world première of John Adams's String Quartet, performed by the St. Lawrence String Quartet. (See page 15.)

MOVIES
CUT AND PASTE

For more than twenty years, the Italian filmmakers Angela Ricci Lucchi and Yervant Gianikian have rephotographed and edited archival footage into essaylike meditations on history. MOMA's monthlong retrospective of their work begins with a screening of their new film, "Ghiro Ghiro Tondo," which deals with war and childhood, followed by a discussion with the filmmakers. (See page 18.)


"Talk about a wake-up call. I had a heart attack at 57"
~John E.
Lafayette, CA
Heart attack: 8/16/2007
a LIPITOR heart to heart

"I should have been doing more for my high cholesterol. I learned the hard way. Now I trust my heart to Lipitor. Talk to your doctor about your risk and about Lipitor."

- **Adding Lipitor may help, when diet and exercise are not enough. Unlike some other cholesterol lowering medications, Lipitor is FDA-approved to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke in patients with several common risk factors,** including family history, high blood pressure, low good cholesterol, age and smoking.
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IMPORTANT INFORMATION: LIPITOR is a prescription drug. It is used in patients with multiple risk factors for heart disease such as family history, high blood pressure, age, low HDL ('good' cholesterol) or smoking to reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke and certain kinds of heart surgeries. When diet and exercise alone are not enough, LIPITOR is used along with a low-fat diet and exercise to lower cholesterol.

LIPITOR is not for everyone. It is not for those with liver problems. And it is not for women who are nursing, pregnant or may become pregnant. If you take LIPITOR, tell your doctor if you feel any new muscle pain or weakness. This could be a sign of rare but serious muscle side effects. Tell your doctor about all medications you take. This may help avoid serious drug interactions. Your doctor should do blood tests to check your liver function before and during treatment and may adjust your dose. The most common side effects are gas, constipation, stomach pain and heartburn. They tend to be mild and often go away.

LIPITOR is one of many cholesterol-lowering treatment options that you and your doctor can consider.

Please see additional important information on next page.

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Have a heart to heart with your doctor about your risk. And about Lipitor.
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LIPITOR
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(LIP-ih-tore)

LOWERING YOUR HIGH CHOLESTEROL

High cholesterol is more than just a number, it's a risk factor that should not be ignored. If your doctor said you have high cholesterol, you may be at an increased risk for heart attack. But the good news is, you can take steps to lower your cholesterol.

With the help of your doctor and a cholesterol-lowering medicine like LIPITOR, along with diet and exercise, you could be on your way to lowering your cholesterol.

Ready to start eating right and exercising more? Talk to your doctor and visit the American Heart Association at www.americanheart.org.

WHO IS LIPITOR FOR?

Who can take LIPITOR:

- People who cannot lower their cholesterol enough with diet and exercise
- Adults and children over 10

Who should NOT take LIPITOR:

- Women who are pregnant, may be pregnant, or may become pregnant. LIPITOR may harm your unborn baby. If you become pregnant, stop LIPITOR and call your doctor right away.
- Women who are breast-feeding. LIPITOR can pass into your breast milk and may harm your baby.
- People with liver problems
- People allergic to anything in LIPITOR

BEFORE YOU START LIPITOR

Tell your doctor:

- About all medications you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements
- If you have muscle aches or weakness
- If you drink more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day
- If you have diabetes or kidney problems
- If you have a thyroid problem

ABOUT LIPITOR

LIPITOR is a prescription medicine. Along with diet and exercise, it lowers "bad" cholesterol in your blood. It can also raise "good" cholesterol (HDL-C).

LIPITOR can lower the risk of heart attack or stroke in patients who have risk factors for heart disease such as:

- age, smoking, high blood pressure, low HDL-C, heart disease in the family, *or*
- diabetes with risk factor such as eye problems, kidney problems, smoking, or high blood pressure

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF LIPITOR

Serious side effects in a small number of people:

- **Muscle problems** that can lead to kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your chance for muscle problems is higher if you take certain other medicines with LIPITOR.
- **Liver problems.** Your doctor may do blood tests to check your liver before you start LIPITOR and while you are taking it.

Symptoms of muscle or liver problems include:

- Unexplained muscle weakness or pain, especially if you have a fever or feel very tired
- Nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain
- Brown or dark-colored urine
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow

If you have these symptoms, call your doctor right away.

The most common side effects of LIPITOR are:

- Headache
- Diarrhea, gas
- Rash
- Constipation
- Upset stomach and stomach pain
- Muscle and joint pain

Side effects are usually mild and may go away by themselves. Fewer than 3 people out of 100 stopped taking LIPITOR because of side effects.

HOW TO TAKE LIPITOR

Do:

- Take LIPITOR as prescribed by your doctor.
- Try to eat heart-healthy foods while you take LIPITOR.
- Take LIPITOR at any time of day, with or without food.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. But if it has been more than 12 hours since your missed dose, wait. Take the next dose at your regular time.

Don't:

- Do not change or stop your dose before talking to your doctor.
- Do not start new medicines before talking to your doctor.
- Do not give your LIPITOR to other people. It may harm them even if your problems are the same.
- Do not break the tablet.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- Ask your doctor or health care provider.
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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

DISFARMER
St. Ann's Warehouse presents a new puppet-theatre work by Dan Hurlin, inspired by the life of the hermetic Arkansas portrait photographer Mike Disfarmer. In previews. Opens Jan. 29. (38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

FLYOVERS
Richard Kind and Michele Pawk star in Jeffrey Sweet's play, about a film critic who returns to his Ohio home town. Sandy Shinner directs. Previews begin Jan. 29. Opens Feb. 2. (78th Street Theatre Lab, 236 W. 78th St. 212-868-4444.)

FREUDIAN SLIPS
The world première of a farce by Marvin Lifschitz, directed by Tom Bloom, in which Sigmund Freud has a showdown with his rival, Dr. Otto Brotto. In previews. Opens Feb. 1. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

HAMLET
The Japan-based Company East puts on a Zen-influenced production, incorporating Noh and modern dance. Opens Jan. 29. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

LOVE/STORIES (OR BUT YOU WILL GET USED TO IT)
The Flea presents the world première of five one-act theatre-themed plays by Itamar Moses. Michelle Tattenbaum directs. Previews begin Jan. 29. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA
Lili Taylor and Jena Malone star in the New Group's production of Eugene O'Neill's trilogy, based on the Oresteia, set in a New England town at the end of the Civil War. Scott Elliott directs. In previews. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

RUINED
Manhattan Theatre Club and the Goodman Theatre present a drama by Lynn Nottage, about a businesswoman caught in the civil war in the Republic of Congo. Kate Whoriskey directs. In previews. (City Center, Stage I, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

SHIPWRECKED! AN ENTERTAINMENT—THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF LOUIS DE ROUGEMENT (AS TOLD BY HIMSELF)
Primary Stages presents the New York première of a play by Donald Margulies ("Dinner with Friends"), an adventure set in nineteenth-century England. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE STORY OF MY LIFE
Neil Bartram wrote the score and Brian Hill wrote the book for this new musical, starring Will Chase and Malcolm Gets, about the relationship between a successful writer and his best friend, who never left home. Directed by Richard Maltby, Jr. Previews begin Feb. 3. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE THIRD STORY
MCC puts on a new play by Charles Busch, who stars, with Kathleen Turner, in a farce that combines the fairy-tale, sci-fi, and gangster genres. In previews. Opens Feb. 2. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

THIS BEAUTIFUL CITY
The Civilians ("Gone Missing") apply their interview-to-musical method to the subject of evangelical Christians, at the Vineyard. Written by Steven Cosson and Jim Lewis, with music and lyrics by Michael Friedman. Previews begin Feb. 3. (108 E. 15th St. 212-353-3366.)

TWELFTH NIGHT
J. R. Sullivan directs the Shakespeare comedy, at the Pearl. In previews. Opens Feb. 2. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

UNCLE VANYA
Maggie Gyllenhaal, Peter Sarsgaard, Mamie Gummer, and Denis O'Hare star in the Chekhov play, directed by Austin Pendleton. In previews. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

WHITE PEOPLE
J. T. Rogers wrote this examination of race in our culture, directed by Gus Reyes. In previews. Opens Feb. 3. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

YOU'RE WELCOME, AMERICA. A FINAL NIGHT WITH GEORGE W. BUSH
Will Ferrell performs a one-man comedy show, directed by Adam McKay. In previews. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

THE AMERICAN PLAN
Manhattan Theatre Club presents Richard Greenberg's play, starring Mercedes Ruehl and Lily Rabe. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CHERRY ORCHARD
This is truly the Chekhov play for the moment—it's about facing up to economic reality, after all—but Sam Mendes's lucid production of Tom Stoppard's adaptation offers more than just relevance, teasing out the play's deeper tragedy, of lost time. The talented cast (which will soon perform "The Winter's Tale," in repertory) is led by Sinéad Cusack, quietly ravishing as Madame Ranevsky, who fritters away the days as her family estate approaches the auction block. Nearly everyone else is just as strong, including Simon Russell Beale, Ethan Hawke, Rebecca Hall, and, as the senile manservant, Richard Easton. Doddering around a bankrupt household with a serving tray, Easton encapsulates all that is funny and shattering about the play, and about worlds that can vaporize in an instant. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

HEDDA GABLER
Mary-Louise Parker, Michael Cerveris, Paul Sparks, Peter Stormare, Lois Markle, and Ana Reeder star in a new adaptation, by Christopher Shinn. Ian Rickson directs the Roundabout Theatre Company production. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

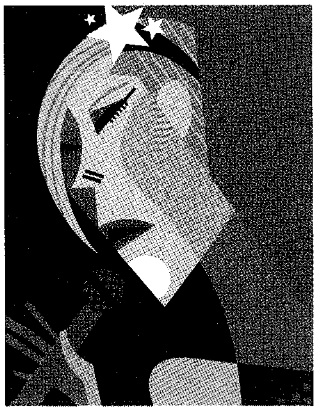
KRAPP, 39
Michael Laurence's well-written and expertly performed solo piece, directed by George Demas, is the actor's response to Beckett's "Krapp's Last Tape," and its themes of "love, loss, art, death, and bananas." "Krapp, 39" is set on Laurence's thirty-ninth birthday, the same birthday that Beckett's character reflects on at the age of sixty-nine, and Laurence's presentation of his life as an artist and a reluctant adult—one who flirts with and often rejects romantic love—closely parallels Krapp's. Using journal entries, recorded messages and phone conversations, letters from schoolchildren, and stories about his lost youth and his confused attempts to grow up, Laurence creates a funny and lacerating self-portrait that earns its affiliation with the classic that inspired it. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

LEAVES OF GLASS
In Philip Ridley's beautifully written, Ibsenesque play, directed by Ludovica Villar-Hauser, Barry (Euan Morton), a ne'er-do-well alcoholic painter, appears at first to be the more troubled of two brothers, both of whom grew up emotionally crippled by their father's suicide. But Barry's brother, Steven (Victor Villar-Hauser), despite the fact that he owns a thriving business, is so paranoid and completely cut off from his feelings that, when his wife tells him that she's pregnant, not only does he assume the baby is someone else's; he assumes it's Barry's. All the performances are first rate; Morton heartbreakingly embodies the complex emotional life of a young man who has so much pain to express and no one able to hear him. (Peter J. Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

OSCAR AND THE PINK LADY
Rosemary Harris portrays all the characters in Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's adaptation of his novel, about a hospital-ridden ten-year-old boy with cancer. Frank Dunlop directs. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100. Through Feb. 1.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

SURVIVAL GUIDE



PABLO LOBATO

The stars who last are often the ones who establish their personas early on. And the mark of the true professional—the true survivor—is an ability to make his presence felt across a considerable span of time without succumbing to the vicissitudes of show biz. When Justin Bond first began performing in New York, in the early nineties, one worried for his health. His most famous creation at the time, Kiki, an aged, wrecked lounge singer with a fondness for the bottle and a propensity for singing loudly—off key—in her act Kiki and Herb, was so physically demanding a role that one was exhausted (albeit exhilarated) in her presence. But Bond's professionalism and training fortified him, and he's at it again, sans wig and age makeup, as the star of "Rites!," at (Le) Poisson Rouge, with a final performance on Feb. 3. Along with his band, led by Our Lady J, Bond performs a variety show of sorts, full of song covers and anecdotes, while teaching us how to survive the future. He's a bar of gold in the new depression.

—*Hilton Als*

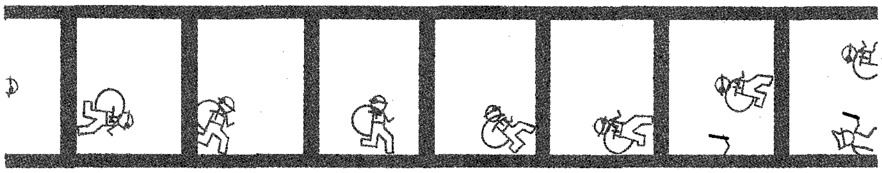
RITES!
Justin Bond, of Kiki and Herb, hosts a cabaret show at (Le) Poisson Rouge, with a final performance on Feb. 3. (158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474.)

THE SHIPMENT
At the start of the latest play by the thirty-four-year-old playwright and director Young Jean Lee, two black men (Prentice Onayemi and the outstandingly funny, high-haired Mikeah Ernest Jennings) are joined by Douglas (the charismatic Douglas Scott Streater), a sort of street comedian who talks shit. Then we're treated to a series of verging-on-ridiculous short scenes that follow the rise and fall of a young rapper named Omar (Okieriete Onodowan). In the second act, set at a penthouse party, the same actors are ostensibly playing the same roles, but they're transformed by the affluent setting and by their pinched diction. The setting has made them white—another social construct. This is so ingenious a twist that, in rethinking everything that has come before—all that "black" language, all those "black" situations—we are forced to confront our own preconceived notions of race. And to agree with Lee that we may not live long enough to purge ourselves of them. (Reviewed in our issue of 1/26/09.) (Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Through Jan. 31.)

TERRE HAUTE
From the West End, a transfer of Edmund White's play, inspired by correspondence between Gore Vidal and Timothy McVeigh. (The two never met; White's characters have different names.) Visiting solitary confinement, the aging, effete James (Peter Eyre) is drawn to Harrison (Nick Westrate) for his looks and his warped intelligence but repulsed by his act of mass murder, for which he is unrepentant. White doesn't stray far from the recycled writer-meets-prisoner scenario—indeed, both characters name-drop Truman Capote—tracing a familiar arc of journalistic calculation, moral ambiguity, and homoeroticism. But he does create an affecting dual portrait of loneliness, marked by a strain of compassion between two men facing different versions of death row. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

Also Playing

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY: Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BECKY SHAW:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE CONNECTION:** Living Theatre, 19 Clinton St. 212-352-3101. **THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200. **EQUUS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **PAL JOEY:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **SHREK THE MUSICAL:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **SLEEPWALK WITH ME:** Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPEED-THE-PLOW:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.



LAURENT CILLUFFO

DVD NOTES
OUT OF THE PAST

For the Italian director Roberto Rossellini, there was no essential difference between his neorealist war stories, his romantic melodramas starring his wife at the time, Ingrid Bergman, and the meticulous bio-pics of historical figures (many now available from Criterion), which were the bulk of his late works. He made the internecine struggles and intellectual debates of centuries past seem as vibrant and vital as contemporary politics and intimate affairs.

The gem of the boxed set **"Rossellini's History Films: Renaissance and Enlightenment"** (Criterion Eclipse) is the three-part series "The Age of Cosimo de Medici," in which Rossellini, with his distinctive sensitivity to the faces, costumes, characters, and spirit of the Quattrocento, seems to bring the world of Florentine paintings to life. As the great banker combats the rapacious aristocracy and brings prosperity to Florence, he also wins renown for the city through his patronage of artists and scholars, particularly the architect and theoretician Leon Battista Alberti, who is the protagonist of the third film in the series. With his invention of a light box fitted with mirrors to display perspectival views in motion, a prototype of the cinema, Alberti justifies his claim that "today one cannot be a good artist if one is not also a good scientist." He appears as a kindred spirit to Rossellini, or the director's idealized self.

Having begun his career during Mussolini's reign before making "Open City," the definitive Resistance drama, in 1945, Rossellini had few illusions about power, the proper use of which, for him, went hand in hand with art. In **"The Taking of Power by Louis XIV,"** from 1966 (Criterion), he unfolds the high political drama behind the dazzling court culture of Versailles. Among the by-products of the King's scheme to defeat disloyal noblemen by concentrating authority in his own person are the innovations of haute cuisine and high fashion. (Meanwhile, the future of literature gets a boost from an appearance by d'Artagnan and his musketeers.)

Rossellini filmed all his stories, regardless of their time frame, in the historical present, and treats both past and present reality not as physical facts but as intellectual ones, which are equally in need of discovery and reconstruction. One of the director's oddest and least familiar works, "Where Is Freedom?," a raucous yet dark-hued comedy from 1954 (in the Lionsgate set **"Roberto Rossellini: Collector's Edition"**), implies, in its very setup, a deep historical perspective. The sad-eyed comic Totò stars as a barber who is on trial for the peculiar crime of breaking *into* prison. He had previously been in jail for the duration of the Second World War, and flashbacks—notably a pair of brilliant, heartbreaking set pieces—suggest what he had missed. One shows the barber contemplating the bulldozed and renovated location of his former shop; the other features the homecoming of an Italian Jew, the sole member of his family to have survived Auschwitz.

—Richard Brody

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Jan. 27: A double bill of piercing, soaring, swirling guitar playing. The Louisiana-based slide master **Sonny Landreth** counts Mark Knopfler and Eric Clapton among his admirers and collaborators (they join him on his latest record, "From the Reach"). His combination of bottleneck, palm, and finger-picking techniques creates waves of sound. The **Campbell Brothers** are purveyors of sacred steel: church music that rocks like crazy. Jan. 29: The acoustic rocker **Jeffrey Gaines** landed in the Top Forty in 2001, after an inspired live cover of Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes" caught the ear of radio programmers. His own songs are soulful and introspective, enhanced by his burnished voice. Jan. 30: The English singer **Terry Reid,** dubbed Superlungs for the raspy falsetto power of his voice, famously turned down, in 1969, Jimmy Page's invitation to be the singer in the post-Yardbirds band that Page was putting together. (Reid's own band was about to go to America to open for the Stones.) He suggested a Birmingham singer who'd recently opened for him, Robert Plant.

THE BELL HOUSE
149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—Jan. 28: **Benjamin Taylor,** the son of James Taylor and Carly Simon, swings by with his band. He'll be joined by a fellow-singer-songwriter with folksy leanings, **Schuyler Fisk,** the daughter of Sissy Spacek. Jan. 29: As the front man of the storied trio the Violent Femmes, **Gordon Gano** used his oddball insights, wry insouciance, and adenoidal vocals to catapult the band into the vanguard of the alternative-rock scene. When **Billy** and **Brendan Ryan,** two versatile musicians formerly of the Bogmen, approached him about collaborating, the tirelessly prolific Gano couldn't refuse. The resulting project meshes the styles of the artists' formidable pedigrees. Jan. 30: **Joseph Arthur,** who started his recording career a decade ago, as the first pop act on Peter Gabriel's globe-trotting label, Real World, has a knack for atmospheric productions and moody grooves. He's performing an acoustic show here, joined by **Harper Simon,** the son of Paul Simon. Jan. 31: Arthur and Simon return, this time with full bands. Later that night: The **Thermals,** a clever trio from Portland, Oregon, traffic in brisk indie rock.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Jan. 30: The **Sword,** which hails from Austin, unleashed a début album, "The Age of Winters," in 2006, much to the grimacing delight of metal fans old and new. Reminiscent of vintage Black Sabbath, the record marked the Sword as a band to watch. They've polished their sound on a new disk, "Gods of the Earth," but not enough to disqualify them as possible saviors of the genre. They're currently taking a quick break from a global tour with Metallica for this headlining Manhattan gig. Jan. 31: **STS9,** a hard-grooving instrumental band from Santa Cruz, California.

CARNEGIE HALL
57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—Jan. 28: The classically trained violinist, singer, and whistler **Andrew Bird,** based in Chicago, is an accomplished musician whose career has zigged

and zagged across the underground. Years ago, he played neo-swing as a collaborator with the Squirrel Nut Zippers. Later, he updated early-twentieth-century blues with his band Bowl of Fire. More recently, he's been writing and performing epic compositions with classic-rock leanings. Through it all, he has toured relentlessly and built up a solid fan base. His new release, "Noble Beast," promises to extend his reach considerably. Feb. 3: The **National, Vampire Weekend, Patti Smith,** and many other artists join **Philip Glass** for the annual Tibet House benefit.

CITY WINERY
143 Varick St. (212-608-0555)—Jan. 29: **Jill Sobule,** a feisty singer-songwriter whose work brings to mind both Liz Phair and Gertrude Stein, burst onto the scene in 1995 with the catchy hit single "I Kissed a Girl." Since then, she's been sharpening her wit and performing and recording steadily. A few years ago, she teamed up with the actor and comedian **Julia Sweeney** for evenings of music and barbed stories.

"LET'S ZYDECO"
The concert series dedicated to Louisiana's various indigenous musical forms has arranged for the return of **Rosie Ledet,** a young female accordionist and bandleader, who is a rarity in the male-dominated zydeco world. She's at Connolly's with her band, the Zydeco Playboys, on Feb. 1. As that happens to be Super Bowl Sunday, there'll be a fifty-two-inch flat-screen TV showing the game, although the real action will be on the dance floor. (121 W. 45th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597 or visit www.letszydeco.com.)

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (800-745-3000)—Jan. 29: The **Kings of Leon** have liberated hard-driving Southern rock from the likes of Molly Hatchet et al. With the **Whigs,** a youthful trio with a knack for big pop hooks. They deliver their songs with a solid wallop that recalls the finer moments of the Replacements.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Jan. 28: The vocalist **Bilal** deftly combines streams of jazz, hip-hop, funk, and soul in his music; he's as comfortable with falsetto and scatting as he is with laying down smooth raps.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Jan. 29: **Andy Friedman,** a cartoonist, visual artist, and contributor to this magazine, has a second career that many people would find hard enough to pull off on its own: he's a country singer, and no ordinary one at that. Using the imagination that got him through art school and the ability to hustle that keeps him afloat in Brooklyn, Friedman has a take on the honky-tonk sound that is wholly unique. He's here celebrating the release of his second album, "Weary Things," backed by his band, the Other Failures.

UNION POOL
484 Union Ave., Brooklyn (718-609-0484)—Jan. 31: **Nervous Cabaret,** stalwarts of a decadent and edgier sliver of the New York rock scene. This theatrical sextet, led by the charismatic Pakistani Londoner Elyas Khan, gleefully breaks the rock mold with raucous playing from a wind-and-brass section. The angular, post-punk rhythmic patterns of the Cabaret's two drummer/percussionists are a perfect backdrop to Khan's frenetic and qawwali-inflected vocals. During this performance, which will feature guest appearances by many Nervous Cabaret alumni, Khan get will married onstage to his longtime partner, Melissa Fowler; the multitalented performer Sxip Shirey will do the honors. With the Boston-based ensemble **Beat Circus.** Led by the songwriter Brian Carpenter on trumpet, pump organ, and vocals in a Tom Waits vein, the band mixes carnivalesque tunes with rock moments. The rich and tight orchestrations feature a Morricone-inspired combination of harmonica, viola, banjo, guitar, tuba, violin, trombone, upright bass, and drums.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Feb. 2: **Lykke Li,** an up-and-coming singer from Sweden with a breathy technique and a winning way.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Jan. 30: A night of music from Hungary, with the vocalist **Beáta Palya.** (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall.) Jan. 31: The great South African a-cappella group **Ladysmith Black Mambazo.** (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. For more information about both shows, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Jan. 28-31: As befits a modern master, the saxophonist **Dave Liebman** is joined by an impressive quartet of hard-swinging players: the trumpeter **Randy Brecker,** the pianist **Marc Copland,** the bassist **Drew Gress,** and the drummer **Billy Hart.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Jan. 28-29: The clever and engaging Canadian singer **Holly Cole** has yet to really find her commercial footing in this country, but she's a star up north. Jan. 30-31: The vocalist **Robin McKelle** has a taste for songbook standards as well as the occasional oddball choice, such as, say, Steve Miller's "Abracadabra."

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through Jan. 31: **Christine Ebersole,** whose run on Broadway in "Grey Gardens" cemented her status as a titan of contemporary musical theatre, presents a new show.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Jan. 27-Feb. 1: No living musician exemplifies the funky side of Blue Note Records' classic era like the irrepressible and highly accomplished alto saxophonist **Lou Donaldson. Akiko Tsuruga** joins him on the essential Hammond B-3 organ. Feb. 2: The trombonist **Clifton Anderson** is a fixture in the bands of Sonny Rollins (he's also the saxophone giant's nephew); here he steps out on his own to promote his new album, "Decade."

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Jan. 28-Feb. 1: The **Joey DeFrancesco Band.** The level of excitement that this electric-organ player regularly generates in live performance will get kicked up a few notches when the virtuosic Gypsy guitarist **Bireli LaGrene** joins him. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Jan. 27-31: The Cuban-born pianist **Gonzalo Rubalcaba** insures that the Latin tinge is never too far removed from his post-bop conception. His highly intuitive quintet includes **Yosvany Terry,** on saxophones, and **Michael Rodriguez,** on trumpet. The Mingus tribute bands are in rotation on Mondays.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Jan. 27-Feb. 1: The drummer **Francisco Mela** is one of the Cuban transplants enriching the current jazz scene; for this run, his quartet features the saxophonist **Greg Osby** and the organist **Sam Yahel.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C."** Through March 15. ♦ **"Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Raphael to Renoir: Drawings from the Collection of Jean Bonna."** Through April

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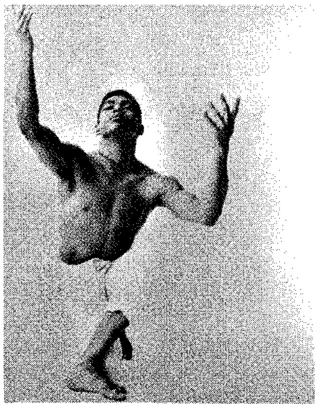
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MORE REVELATIONS



On Sunday, Feb. 1, the Film Society of Lincoln Center will host a nine-hour "Alvin Ailey Day," including precious old material, most of it from TV shows made in the sixties and seventies. Ailey retired from the stage very early (he got fat). Here's the proof of what the old-timers say: he was a thrilling, headlong dancer. In footage of pieces by Lester Horton, Ailey's teacher and mentor, you can find out—it's sort of a shock—how much, move for move, Ailey took from Horton, and also what Carmen de Lavallade, Ailey's friend, partner, and encourager, looked like in her glory days. Several programs feature Judith Jamison (now the company's director), with a waist like a python, and other beloved Ailey veterans: Dudley Williams, Clive Thompson, Donna Wood, the sweet-faced Sara Yarborough. The Afros are huge, and so is the conviction. A final treasure is a 1962 telecast of the 1960 "Revelations," showing what that world-famous dance looked like (not as good) before its many revisions. To get times, see www.filmlinc.com, but I say go all day.

—*Joan Acocella*

19. ♦ **"Art and Love in Renaissance Italy."** Through Feb. 16. ♦ **"Raqib Shaw."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Calder Jewelry."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard."** Opens Feb. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave."** Through Feb. 16. ♦ **"Pipilotti Rist: Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)."** Through Feb. 2. ♦ **"Vik Muniz: Rebus."** Through Feb. 23. ♦ **"The Printed Picture."** This sprawling exhibition, derived from the museum's recent publication of the master printer Richard Benson's book "The Printed Picture," is divided into twenty sections, and follows, step by step, the development of the technology for making multiple, reproducible images—from the woodcut, the etching, and the lithograph to the computer-generated ink-jet print. Even if your appetite for technological detail and subtle differences is quickly sated, the material is fascinating and smartly presented. Benson emphasizes the impact of the printed photograph on newspapers, magazines, and books, and traces the history of the photographic print in examples by Strand, Evans, Weston, Winogrand, Penn, and others (including an excessive number by Benson himself) and provides lucid descriptions of the latest processes. Through July 13. ♦ **"Performance 1: Teching Hsieh."** Through May 18. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989."** Opens Jan. 30. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Alex Bag."** Through April 30. ♦ **"Elad Lassry: Three Films."** Through April 30. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"The Black List Project: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and Elvis Mitchell."** Through March 29. ♦ **"Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection."** Through April 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"Martin Ramirez: The Last Works."** Through April 12. ♦ **"The Seduction of Light: Ammi Phillips and Mark Rothko, Compositions in Pink, Green, and Red."** Through March 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and until 7:30 on Fridays.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Edward Steichen: In High Fashion."** Through May 3. ♦ **"Weird Beauty: Fashion Photography Now."** Through May 3. ♦ **"This Is Not a Fashion Photograph."** Through May 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"On the Money: Cartoons for *The New Yorker*."** Through May 24. ♦ **"The Thaw Collection of Master Drawings: Acquisitions Since 2002."** Through May 3. ♦ **"Protecting the Word: Bookbindings of the Morgan."** Through March 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Daria Martin: Minotaur."** Opens Jan. 28. ♦ **"Mathias Poledna: Crystal Palace."** Opens Jan. 28. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

ADOU
This Chinese photographer makes his American début with haunting pictures taken in a remote and barren area of Sichuan province. There are echoes here of Curtis's early-twentieth-century sepia studies of Native Americans, but a mood of desolation prevails. The use of expired film results in mottled, slightly foggy prints, the largest of which are creamy beige and well suited to the works' timeless aura. A girl perches in the cleft of a young tree; a boy chews a piece of meat; a man brings a goose to market. Adou's intensely focussed attention gives these ordinary moments extraordinary weight. Through Feb. 14. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

PATRICIA COFFIE
In her memorable solo début, this Ghanaian-born, New York-based photographer probes black identity in collaboration with the African-American performance artist Michael Calloway. Blackface makeup is just the beginning of Calloway's outrageous appearance here. In costumes that incorporate feathers, turbans, a homemade crown, and patchwork wings, he looks not clownish but shamanic: the high priest of some renegade fashion tribe. Even wearing nothing but a tie and a fedora, he has a riveting presence, and Coffie makes the most of it. Many of her square, relatively small color photographs are made just inches from Calloway's body—so close that you can almost feel the heat of like minds combusting. Through Feb. 14. (Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-752-2929.)

EVA LUNDSAGER
Watercolors and oils hit the eye with a happy-go-lucky palette favoring pink, tangerine, and yellow, and allusive forms that tilt toward landscape. Things devolve intriguingly on close inspection, however, as one registers the gravity-defiant upward-running drips, the stormy blues and purples shadowing the cheery colors, and the melting of sea and mountain into scribbles of cloud or smoke. The climate of moody deliquescence is more pronounced in the largest paintings, perhaps because Lundsager's graceful notebook-size watercolors, embellished with sumi ink, have the air of paradise found. Through Feb. 7. (Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444.)

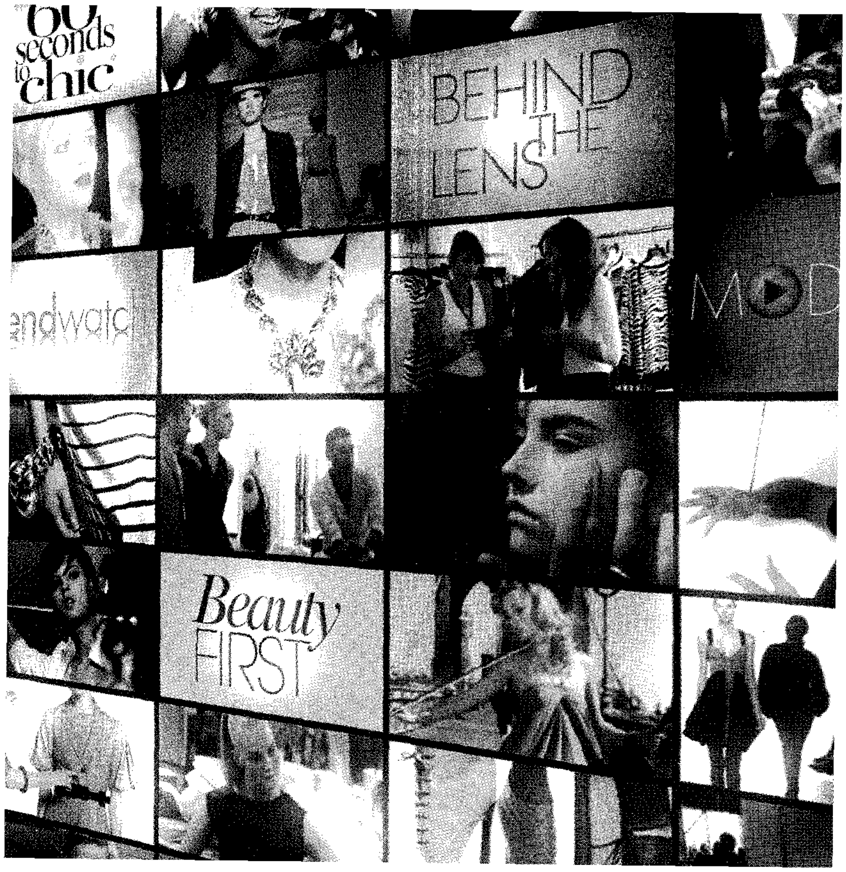
Short List

PETER DOIG: Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through March 14. **FRED SANDBACK:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through Feb. 28. **LAWRENCE WEINER:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-581-5187. Through Feb. 21.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

MONA HATOUM
The Palestinian-born Brit's soft-core political art continues to beguile and annoy. How are we to take a ceiling-hung, rotating brass lamp that casts gliding bright silhouettes of shell-bursts and fighting soldiers on the walls of a dark room? It's very pretty, as is a lustrous silk-organza kaffiyeh embroidered with a chicken-wire pattern in metal thread. Then, there's a table strewn with colored crystal objects the size and shape of hand grenades, begging to be picked up and thrown—but at whom? Hatoum alludes to savageries of war and anguishes of conscience so vaguely, and with such imperturbable elegance, that the effect is more lulling—numbing, even—than otherwise. Through Feb. 21. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-357-7474.)

ROLAND MAXON


60 seconds to chic
BEHIND THE LENS
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MOD
Beauty FIRST

IMI KNOEBEL
The perennial other German artist in the great generation of Polke and Palermo is back, with big abstract reliefs of overlaid and glossily painted aluminum plates and hollow bars. The geometries are assertive and clunky, the colors loud and dissonant. Knoebel has long been adept at seizing attention while doing rather little to reward it. Frantically effortful, his new architecturally scaled ensembles suggest Ellsworth Kellys that overshot their aesthetic runway. They are to architectural décor what fire drills are to afternoon tea. You won't forget them, though you're likely to try. Through Feb. 14. (Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929.)

Short List

ALLORA & CALZADILLA: Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Feb. 22. **MARY HEILMANN:** 303 Gallery, 547 W. 21st St. 212-255-1121. Through Feb. 21. **ON KAWARA:** Zwirner, 519 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Feb. 14. **CHARLES LONG:** Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144. Through Feb. 21. **PIERO MANZONI:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through March 21. **SARA GREENBERGER RAFFERTY:** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through March 7. **MIKA ROTTENBERG:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Feb. 28.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

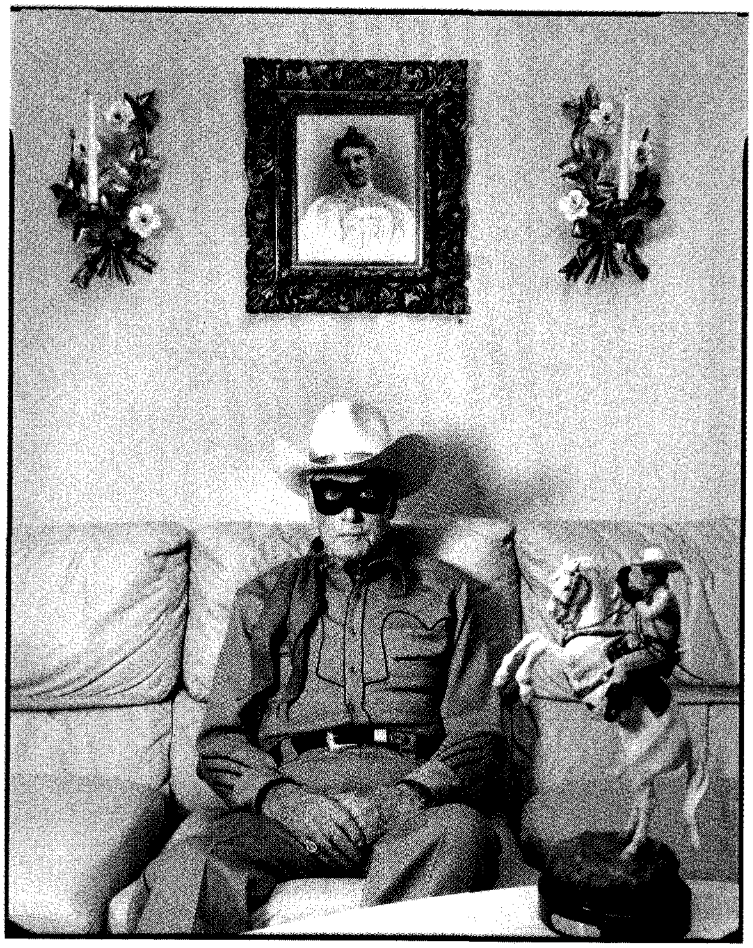
JASON FOX
The deeply talented Fox has modulated his formerly cartoonish style into varieties of semi-abstraction that are at once intense and devil-may-care. Painted, mostly, in strident Chinese red, brushed with browns as filmy as shadows, the pictures melt hints of faces, figures, and objects into minimally effortful gestural cadenzas. An effect of pressured but nonchalant subjectivity suggests snatches of normal conversation at a heavy-metal concert or stray thoughts in a burning building. Fox's is an uncannily companionable art, which can seem to have been waiting for you to show up. Its mind-reading quality recalls the best early work of David Salle, minus the archness. Through March 7. (Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

MATT JOHNSON
In a dramatic new gallery (a long, narrow, super-high-ceilinged space, which was formerly Frank Stella's studio), cunningly carpentered conceptual japes by Johnson evoke an old species of household amenity—the conversation piece. Consider an outsized bentwood chair, which casually crosses its front legs; a big box topped with what look like two stacked planks, which pop open in a complicated manner to reveal an empty bin; Rodin's "Thinker" remade in jigsaw-puzzle-like masses; or nested walnut shells sculpted in walnut wood. It's all thoroughly light-minded, but nifty to the max. Through Feb. 14. (Taxter & Spengemann, 123 E. 12th St. 212-924-0212.)

LIZ RENAY
Renay (1926-2007) was a bombshell. An actress, author, and member of the Burlesque Hall of Fame, she was married seven times—although it was her affair with the mobster Mickey Cohen that earned her a stint in prison for perjury. What makes Renay gallery-worthy, however, are her stunning, Pop-fantastical paintings. Full of sexy nymphs, devilish satyrs, flying fairies, and sparkling pink and blue landscapes, Renay's paintings—shown here along with ephemera and costumes from her archive—suggest a hybrid fantasia of Karen Kilimnik and Jim Shaw's trove of Thrift Store Paintings. It's a giddy, guilty pleasure—like worshipping at the high altar of camp. Through Jan. 31. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 212-343-7300.)

Short List

JOSÉ LEÓN CERRILLO: Dispatch, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783. Through Jan. 31. **PETER DOIG:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through Feb. 21. **PAM LINS:** Uffner, 47 Orchard St. 212-274-0064. Through Feb. 8. **MARY ELLEN MARK:** Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-6223. Through Feb. 14. **SETH PRICE:** Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006. Through Feb. 22. **ERIK VAN LIESHOUT:** Maccarone, 630 Greenwich St. 212-431-4977. Through Feb. 21.


"Clayton Moore, the Former Lone Ranger, at His Home in Los Angeles, 1992," by Mary Ellen Mark, at Staley-Wise.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Wednesday is the last chance to catch the "Four Voices" program, which includes Alexei Ratmansky's smashing new ballet from last season, "Concerto DSCH." In addition to wonderful music (Shostakovich's Concerto No. 2 in F Major) and witty, sporty choreography, the casting is tops: Wendy Whelan and Benjamin Millepied are a yearning, dreamy couple, while Joaquin De Luz and Gonzalo Garcia are charming and well-matched competitors for Ana Sophia Scheller's attentions. Jerome Robbins's collaboration with Twyla Tharp, "Brahms/Handel," is neither choreographer's best work, but it's worth a look nonetheless, if only for a chance to see the normally courtly Philip Neal truly cut a rug. ♦ Jan. 28 at 7:30: "Chiaroscuro," "Papillons," "Concerto DSCH," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." ♦ Jan. 29 and Jan. 31 at 8: "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Dances at a Gathering," and "Stars and Stripes." ♦ Jan. 30 at 8 and Feb. 1 at 3: "Divertimento No. 15," "Stabat Mater," and "Brahms/Handel." ♦ Jan. 31 at 2 and Feb. 3 at 7:30: "Flower Festival in Genzano Pas de Deux," "La Stravaganza," "After the Rain" (pas de deux), "Lifecasting," and "Theme and Variations." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through March 1.)

URSULA EAGLY / SHANNON GILLEN
Dance New Amsterdam's "Air Splice" series pairs two choreographers who aren't afraid of broad theatricality or the line between hilarious and disturbing. In Eagly's "Aaron Mattocks," the eponymous dancer and the choreographer, dressed as Mattocks, twist through a world dominated by a couple of sadists who play a humming, milk-drinking game. In "Vacationland," Gillen, the co-director of the Doorknob Company, puts her anxious spin on the standard story line of a family unravelling while on holiday. (280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. Jan. 29-31 at 8 and Feb. 1 at 3.)

REBECCA LAZIER / TERRAIN
The experimental choreographer brings her collaborative company—which includes the multi-talented dancer/choreographer/puppeteer Christopher Williams—to Joyce SoHo. In "Terminal," Lazier explores the dynamics of viewers' responses, placing the audience within the same sound and light environment as the dancers. "Serenade" is set to one of the most recognizable musical scores used by Balanchine, Tchaikovsky's "Serenade for Strings in C." (155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. Jan. 29-30 at 8 and Jan. 31 at 3 and 8.)

DAVID CAPPS/DANCES
Having recently returned to New York after thirteen years at the University of Colorado at Boulder, Capps shares what he's been up to, including two premières, at Danspace Project. The new "6 Dreams: Salt Air" distills the stark, contemplative beauty of John Luther Adams's "Clouds of Forgetting, Clouds of Unknowing." The same musical sensitivity and flowing lucidity are evident in pieces set to Beethoven, Schubert, and Ives, and are particularly lovely in Capps's use of Messiaen in "A Light Through the Window." (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Jan. 29-31 at 8:30.)

THUNDERBIRD AMERICAN INDIAN DANCERS
Part pageant, part reunion, part lecture-demonstration, this annual powwow has been a New York tradition since 1976. This year, the collection of Native American traditions includes a Hoop Dance, a Caribou Dance, a Shawl Dance, a Jingle Dress Dance, a Stomp Dance, and a Butterfly Dance. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave. 212-254-1109. Jan. 30 at 8, Jan. 31 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 1 at 3. Through Feb. 8.)

"WORKS & PROCESS"
There is a dearth of female choreographers in ballet, a situation that American Ballet Theatre is attempting to address through its "Altria/A.B.T. Women's Choreography Project." The project's first commission went to the imaginative young Canadian Aszure Barton, who last year made a delightful piece for A.B.T. II (the studio company), "Barbara," set to songs by the eponymous French

chanteuse, which will be performed at the Guggenheim, along with a pas de deux from Lauri Stallings's "Slokas." Barton, Wes Chapman (the artistic director of A.B.T. II), and Stephen Pier (the Choreographic Mentor at the Juilliard School) will then discuss the role of women in ballet. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Feb. 1-2 at 7:30.)

BUGLISI DANCE THEATRE
Jacqulyn Buglisi celebrates the fifteenth anniversary of her troupe with some fashion-world glamour. In "Wild Mannequins & Wing Walkers," her attractive dancers move among the blank-faced creations of the mannequin-maker Ralph Pucci, the contrast between animate and inanimate confusingly crossed with an homage to heroic women. "Interplay No. 9½" is Robbinsesque in title and conception—a suite of piano pieces, a community of dancers, wistful interactions—but only sporadically so in invention and execution. Two barely divergent programs feature both premières and are anchored by a Buglisi work of a much higher level, her powerful piece "Suspended Women." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 3 at 7:30. Through Feb. 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
The Met's enchanting production of Gluck's **"Orfeo ed Euridice,"** choreographed and directed by Mark Morris, with Danielle de Niese, Ying Huang, and the extraordinary Stephanie Blythe in the leading roles; Kazem Abdullah conducts. (Jan. 28 and Jan. 31 at 8. These are the final performances.) ♦ Mary Zimmerman's daring 2007 production of **"Lucia di Lammermoor,"** while undeniably theatrical, upset a number of traditionalists who were used to the Met's formerly conservative staging; it returns, in a very brief run, as a star vehicle for Anna Netrebko and Rolando Villazón. The gilt-edged cast also includes Mariusz Kwiecien and Ildar Abdrazakov; Marco Armiliato. (Jan. 29 and Feb. 3 at 8.) ♦ Robert Carsen's more than durable production of **"Eugene Onegin,"** Tchaikovsky's searing study (via Pushkin) of doomed love amid nineteenth-century Russia's useless upper middle class, is costumed in period but set in a big plain box in which mere suggestions of detail—a slender tree, a cascade of flower petals—have enormous emotional resonance. Having proved to be a sturdy platform for the likes of Renée Fleming and Dmitri Hvorostovsky, it returns with Karita Mattila as Tatiana, Piotr Beczala as Lenski, and Thomas Hampson in the title role; the renowned Czech conductor Jiri Belohlávek is on the podium. (Jan. 30 and Feb. 2 at 8.) ♦ The company's Otto Schenk production of **"Rigoletto,"** sumptuously faithful to its Renaissance setting, returns with Aleksandra Kurzak, Giuseppe Filianoti, and George Gagnidze in the leading roles; Riccardo Frizza. (Jan. 31 at 1.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
With City Opera saved from the gallows by the appointment of George Steel as general manager, this season's occasional, small-scale concerts continue. The next is a collaborative effort with Harlem's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and Opera Noire, a tribute to the important African-American performers and composers whose work has been offered at City Opera through the decades. The program includes music from such operas as Anthony Davis's "X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X" and Richard Danielpour's "Margaret Garner" (with a libretto by Toni Morrison). (515 Malcolm X Blvd., between 110th and 111th Sts. 212-491-2206. Jan. 28 at 7.)

DICAPO OPERA
Although the long-running Amato Opera will bow out at the end of the season, this small (but fully professional) company, ensconced in a capacious theatre on the lower level of St. Jean Baptiste Church, still thrives. Its next production is a short run of **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** conducted by Samuel Bill. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 212-288-9438, ext. 10. Jan. 30-31 at 8 and Feb. 1 at 4.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Though newly (and happily) installed in Chicago, Riccardo Muti's presence at New York's flagship orchestra will be ever more frequent in the Alan Gilbert era. He indulges his longtime love of the tempestuous orchestral music of Scriabin by conducting performances of the Second Symphony, as well as Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto (featuring the magisterial Radu Lupu at the keyboard). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Jan. 29 at 7:30 and Jan. 30-31 at 8.)

BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC
The borough's resilient orchestra, carrying on in trying times, offers a "Nuevo Latino" festival, which features vibrant music by Latin-American composers. Jan. 28 at 8: Gonzalo Grau, a composer and percussionist in the orbit of the charismatic Osvaldo Golijov, brings his salsa-fusion band La Clave Secreta together with members of the orchestra for "Noche de Ritmos," an informal concert hosted by Michael Christie, the orchestra's music director. (Brooklyn Masonic Temple, 317 Clermont Ave.) ♦ Jan. 30 at 8: "Club Nocturno," a chamber concert featuring the violinist Jennifer Curtis and the Venezuelan cellist and composer Paul Desenne, among others. (Galapagos Art Space, Main St. at Water St., Dumbo.) ♦ Jan. 31 at 8: The whole orchestra, conducted by Christie, assembles for a free main-stage concert featuring works by Enrico Chapela, Paul Desenne, and Gabriela Lena Frank ("Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout"). (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave.) (718-488-5913.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
In his third concerto for sitar and orchestra, the Indian master Ravi Shankar has given the soloist's role to his daughter Anoushka Shankar. Orpheus, which commissioned it, gives the world première at Carnegie Hall, part of a concert that also includes music by Mozart, Kodály ("Summer Evening"), and Haydn (the Symphony No. 99 in E-Flat Major). (212-247-7800. Jan. 31 at 8.)

RECITALS

MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE
2009 is the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Felix Mendelssohn, the gentle genius whose works were unfairly maligned by Wagner and banned by the Nazis. In a concert under the auspices of the Mendelssohn Project, a group of superb young musicians—including the pianist Orion Weiss and the Shanghai Quartet—offer a program that includes thirteen world-première works. (36 Battery Pl. 646-437-4202. Jan. 28 at 7.)

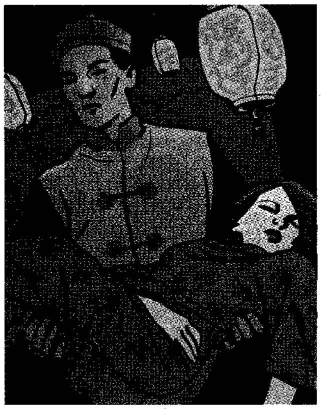
"CELEBRATING HUNGARY"
Zankel Hall's festival of Magyar music hits its stride with three programs of contemporary works. Jan. 29 at 7:30: As both composer and conductor, Peter Eötvös holds a commanding position in Europe not unlike that of Oliver Knussen in Britain. He conducts the Ensemble ACJW (with guest soloists) in a program of his own works (including four U.S. premières). ♦ Jan. 31 at 7:30: Hungary's two greatest composers after Bartók are fêted in this concert conducted by Eötvös, with performances of three works by György Kurtág (featuring the world première of "Songs to Poems by Anna Akhmatova," Op. 41) and three by the late György Ligeti (including "Melodien" and the Cello Concerto). ♦ Feb. 1 at 7:30: In an extraordinarily rare event, Kurtág—a renowned pianist as well as a composer of excruciatingly expressive miniatures—joins his wife, Márta, at two upright pianos to perform excerpts from his seminal work "Játékok" ("Games"); Hiromi Kikuchi performs the "Hipartita" for solo violin. (212-247-7800.)

JUILLIARD "FOCUS!" FESTIVAL
John Adams commands the heights of this year's festival, centered on composers from California. Jan. 29 at 8: The inspired St. Lawrence String Quartet (with friends) is featured in a program in which "Gran Turismo," a snappy piece by the young composer Andrew Norman, opens a concert that con-

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ON THE WATERFRONT

D. W. Griffith's "Broken Blossoms," which screens at MOMA on Jan. 29, is ninety years old, and in some respects the film is looking its age. The performance of Donald Crisp, as a bestial boxer in London's East End, comes wrapped in ham, like so much early screen villainy (he would fare better alongside Buster Keaton in "The Navigator"). As for the printed titles, you don't know whether to snicker at the late-Victorian moralizing or wince at the racial nomenclature. Yet there is something in the tenderness of the telling, and the grace of the compositions, that stills the urge to jeer. Miss Lillian Gish, as the credits call her, is extraordinary as the Dickensian waif who is rescued from her father's whip by a Chinese merchant (Richard Barthelmess). The images of boats and wharves are as delicate as a Whistler etching, and, if Chaplin mastered the face in closeup, Griffith saw that human hands could be no less expressive. He was the first director (though not the last) who prided himself on epic largesse yet conjured much of his finest work from the problems of two little people.

—*Anthony Lane*



KYLE T. WEBSTER

tinues with classic works by Ingram Marshall ("Fog Tropes") and Lou Harrison and concludes with the world première of Adams's String Quartet. ♦ Jan. 31 at 8: Adams conducts the Juilliard Orchestra and a host of student singers in a concert performance of his ever-controversial opera **"The Death of Klinghoffer."** (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. For full schedule, see www.juilliard.edu; for information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

BARGEMUSIC

Jan. 30 at 8: The Jubilee Trio (contralto, baritone, and piano) offers "Songs of Struggle and Resolution," a concert that celebrates both Lincoln's birthday and the hundredth anniversary of the N.A.A.C.P. by featuring works by such renowned composers as Harry T. Burleigh, J. Rosamond Johnson, Henry Cowell, and George Rochberg. ♦ Jan. 31 at 8 and Feb. 1 at 3: The Manhattan Symphonee squeezes onto the barge to celebrate Mendelssohn's two-hundredth birthday with performances of the Piano Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, the Violin Concerto (with Mark Peskanov), and the "Italian" Symphony. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

JOYCE YANG

The acclaimed silver medalist in the 2005 Van Cliburn Competition makes her New York recital début at the Metropolitan Museum, performing works by Lowell Liebermann, Carl Vine, Scarlatti (four sonatas), and Schumann ("Carnaval"). (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Jan. 31 at 7.)

PIFFARO, PARTHENIA, AND ELISION

The three groups—an acclaimed Renaissance band, a consort of viols, and a chamber choir—team up for "A Royal Christening and Music Banquet," a reënactment (without baby) of the baptism, in 1616, of Prince Frederick of Württemberg, in a Miller Theatre concert at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin. (145 W. 46th St. 212-854-7799. Jan. 31 at 8.)

CHRISTIAN TETZLAFF AND LEIF OVE ANDSNES

Two of classical music's most perceptive and formidable artists (on violin and piano, respectively) come together at Carnegie Hall to offer sonatas for their paired instruments by Janáček, Brahms (No. 3 in D Minor), and Mozart, as well as Schubert's "Rondo Brillant," D. 895. (212-247-7800. Feb. 2 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

BLESSED IS THE MATCH

A documentary, directed by Roberta Grossman, about Hannah Senesh, a writer who became a Resistance fighter during the Second World War. Opening Jan. 28. (Sunshine Cinema.)

MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY

Barry Jenkins directed this romance, about a couple who decide to start dating after their one-night stand. Opening Jan. 30. (IFC Center.)

NEW IN TOWN

A comedy about a woman from Miami who must get used to life in small-town Minnesota. Starring Renée Zellweger and Harry Connick, Jr.; directed by Jonas Elmer. Opening Jan. 30. (In wide release.)

SERBIS

Brillante Mendoza directed this drama, from the Philippines, about members of a family who live in the porn theatre they run. In Tagalog. Opening Jan. 30. (Angelika Film Center.)

SHADOWS

A drama, directed by Milcho Manchevski, about a man who, after a car accident, has encounters with the dead. In Macedonian. Opening Jan. 30. (Cinema Village.)

TAKEN

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Jan. 30. (In wide release.)

THE UNINVITED

In this thriller, directed by Charles Guard and Thomas Guard, a girl suspects her father's girlfriend of murder. Starring Elizabeth Banks, Emily Browning, and David Strathairn. Opening Jan. 30. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

CHE

Released in two parts, Steven Soderbergh's new film concentrates on two defining episodes from the life of Che Guevara (Benicio Del Toro). First comes his arrival in Cuba, in 1956, and the rebel campaign that gathered force across the island and took the town of Santa Clara. (The action pulls up short of the crowning triumph, Che's entry into Havana: Soderbergh is both stirred by the cause and suspicious of idolatrous thrills.) The second movie jumps to the mid-nineteen-sixties, and Che's efforts to spark a revolutionary movement in Bolivia; a far more sparse and desperate affair, with our hero—if that is what he is, by now—finally cornered and killed in the most sordid of circumstances. The screenwriters, Peter Buchman and Benjamin A. van der Veen, pepper this pair of stories with flashes back to an early meeting with Castro, and forward to a later visit to New York, where Che addressed the United Nations—shot in black-and-white, as if America were another world entirely. Del Toro's performance, with its rare smiles and hints of merciless discipline, is as guarded as the film itself, which somehow, for all its rigorous attention to detail, evokes a sense of flatness and inconsequence. Fans and mythologists of Che will raise only a half-cheer; his detractors will wonder what happened to the executions carried out under his name after the revolution, or his fumbled attempts to run the Cuban economy. In Spanish and English.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/19/09.) (In wide release.)

CHERRY BLOSSOMS

Doris Dörrie's poky, odd, but poetic progress of a middle-aged widower to an emotionally satisfying state of mourning. It turns out that Trudi (Hannelore Elsner), a Bavarian hausfrau, was fascinated, as a young woman, with Butoh, an amalgam of German and Japanese avant-garde dance techniques. When she dies, her grief-stricken husband, Rudi (Elmar Wepper), goes to Tokyo to visit one of their children and falls in with a teen-age girl who performs Butoh along a canal. She teaches him how to mourn. The movie's conceits are just barely endurable, but the sharpness of Dörrie's eye—for Tokyo's electric night, for Mt. Fuji's iconographic landscapes, for cherry blossoms—carries emotion along even when story logic fails. In German, English, and Japanese.—*David Denby* (1/26/09) (Sunshine Cinema.)

THE CLASS

Extraordinary. François Bégaudeau, a teacher in a Paris public school in the Twentieth Arrondissement, published a novel in 2006 chronicling a year in his classroom. Along with the director Laurent Cantet and the writer Robin Campillo, he then condensed and reshaped the material into a two-hour drama centering on the teacher (Bégaudeau, playing himself) and a small number of students (all played by actual students, though not the same ones he wrote about). Bégaudeau, who is in his thirties, is handsome, lean, and quick, with a strong voice; his slouching or rowdy fourteen-year-olds are mostly of African or Caribbean descent—still outsiders in France, and rightfully touchy about it. Some of them are resistant to education, which disrupts the pleasures of adolescence, and Bégaudeau aggressively comes after them, challenging, correcting, teasing, criticizing. The students are alive to him and come back hard, questioning French notions of discipline and manners. In all, "The Class" is a prime document of French post-colonial blues, though its relevance to American urban education could not be any greater if it had been shot in the Bronx or Trenton or South Los Angeles. In French.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/08) (In limited release.)

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON

A child is born in New Orleans in 1918 with the features and internal organs of an old man; then, as time passes, his age declines until he goes through late middle age, middle age, youth, and so on, back toward infancy and death. This science-fiction reverse-aging conceit, from an early F. Scott Fitzgerald story, has been rendered by the writer Eric Roth and the director David Fincher with a fanatical literalness that occasion-

TABLES FOR TWO
BRAEBURN

NATALIE MATUTSCHOVSKY

117 Perry St., at Greenwich St. (212-255-0696)—The Braeburn apple sprang from a chance seedling, but the Braeburn in the West Village exudes careful cultivation. The restaurant's lines are both modern and rustic—sleek teardrop light fixtures appeal to the urbanite, alder-wood branches in the window to the ruralist. The bar area is done in dark wood, pussy willows fill a great vase, and waitstaff wear plaid shirts. The over-all effect is that of a highly sanitized farmhouse, and yet, for all the contrivance, the place comes by it honestly: the chef, Brian Bistrong, once worked on a farm in New Jersey; a painting of his pastoral home in Connecticut hangs on a wall. Still, the city can't help but intrude: on a recent evening, the dim room was pierced by the strobe of a police car's lights outside. "This is a busy corner," the bartender said. "They pull someone over every night."

Bistrong, who most recently was the chef at the Harrison, concentrates on simple, hearty fare: a thick sirloin steak, a nicely roasted chicken (birthplace: Pennsylvania). Above all, there's an attitude of respect—for the diner, for the cooks, for the ingredients. "I believe in saying hello and goodbye," Bistrong once told the *Times*. "It shows you care, not just about being in the kitchen, but about the people you're working with." Unfortunately, sometimes respect can feel a lot like restraint. The duck breast, for instance, was perfectly cooked, succulent without being indulgently fatty, and surrounded by shredded Brussels sprouts. You'd be hard pressed, though, to remember the dish the next day. A rack of pork was notable for its sheer size, but there was little to distinguish it from any other mammoth piece of pig. Occasionally, a dish will break out, in one direction or another. The other night, the crab salad achieved the dubious distinction, thanks to a passion-fruit sauce, of cloying, lingering sweetness. The cod, on the other hand, was accompanied beautifully by a vivid onion-bonito broth and bright-green bok choy. Bistrong seems to approach his restaurant with a farmer's self-effacing competence; but, for the price, and with a chef who has proved his mettle elsewhere, you want a little more big-city braggadocio. (Open weekdays for dinner, and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $22-$32.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

ally touches on the uncanny but often feels laborious and even pedantic. As Benjamin becomes younger, he turns into the handsome, fortyish Brad Pitt, and he has an affair with a vibrant, normally aging dancer (Cate Blanchett). They meet in the middle, so to speak, but the relationship is odd, since, instead of the fervent memories of youth, Benjamin has only the relief that he is no longer a crotchety old man. He's bland; he's Brad Pitt. There is much else, about New Orleans, the sea, and many other things, but the movie is an attenuated folly.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

DEFIANCE

In the fall of 1941, in Nazi-occupied Belarus (just east of Poland), where Jews were being executed by the thousands, four brothers from a large farming family named Bielski went into the forest along with a few other people determined to survive. Eventually, twelve hundred Jews seeped out of the ghettos and joined the Bielski Otriad (Detachment). Some threw in their lot with Soviet partisans; the rest miraculously improvised a civil society in the woods, complete with hospital, bathhouse, and tannery. The director, Edward Zwick, and the screenwriter, Clayton Frohman, working with material from Nechama Tec's 1993 historical study of the same title, have shaped a stirring narrative. Though the action—shot by Eduardo Serra very near to the actual sites—is, at times, too theatrically staged, Zwick generally keeps it blunt and terse. Daniel Craig, speaking in a dry, shiv-like voice, is the smart, dominating leader, Tuvia Bielski, and he plays this Moses figure without losing his sex appeal. Liev Schreiber, surly and tough, is his quarrelsome younger brother, and there is an enormous cast of minor actors and extras, some of them memorable. James Newton Howard wrote the thunderous and lachrymose score—the weakest element in the movie.—*D.D.* (1/12/09) (In wide release.)

GRAN TORINO

Clint Eastwood appears as, in effect, the last white man in America, guarding what might be called the last American car—a green 1972 Ford Gran Torino, lovingly preserved in his garage in rundown Highland Park, just outside Detroit. Eastwood, who also directed, stars as Walt Kowalski, a racist old man who lives next door to a family of Asian immigrants. At first, Walt (a vision of what Dirty Harry might have become) is their antagonist, but he then becomes their protector, as he helps them fight off the neighborhood gangs. The movie ends with a surprising act of renunciation. Although it's a minor work, the film is fascinating if you're interested in Eastwood's reflections on the characters he's played and his role in American iconography.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/08) (In wide release.)

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION

This implausible, extravagant, coincidence-riddled romantic drama, from 1954, made Rock Hudson a star and Douglas Sirk a specialist in "women's pictures," a mawkish genre that he infused with a philosophical import all his own. The plot, familiar from a 1935 version, astonishes: Bob Merrick (Hudson) is an arrogant playboy in a small town in upstate New York, whose mischief contributes to the death of a beloved doctor, Wayne Phillips. Merrick meets and falls for Phillips's widow (Jane Wyman), gets her into an accident that blinds her, and becomes a brain surgeon who will ultimately attempt to restore her sight. Phillips turns out to have been something of a religious philosopher, whose metaphysics of charity unlocked the talent of his best friend (Otto Kruger), an artist, who, in turn, imparts the wisdom to Merrick—and Sirk, who emigrated from Germany in 1937, locates the source of this New World gospel in the lovingly depicted American landscape. Besides treating the ridiculous story with the utmost dramatic precision and visual coherence, the director lends it surprising thematic depth. Every step depends on stifled emotions and closely guarded secrets, resulting in a buildup of operatic passion that never bursts into song and endows everyday gestures and inflections with grandeur and nobility.—*Richard Brody* (Anthology Film Archives; Jan. 29 and Jan. 31.)

MILK

Gus Van Sant's vibrantly entertaining bio-pic recreates, without starchiness, the San Francisco life of the gay activist and politician Harvey Milk (Sean Penn), who was assassinated in 1978, along with Mayor George Moscone, by a fellow-politician, the family-values conservative Dan White (Josh Brolin). The righteous march of events is warmed by the banter, the casual sex, and the candor of the gay milieu in the giddy seventies, the period just before AIDS, when life was free and easy. Much of the time, Penn keeps his voice down, but the fervor and humor are there in the most offhanded moments. Without ostentation, he creates a new body, a new temperament: he loosens his neck and shoulders and swivels his head; his smile is enormous and all-embracing; he holds an elbow out and pumps a forearm up and down like a semaphore as Harvey speaks in public. Brolin, a slab of hair lying low across his forehead, gives White a brick-headed, baffled manner, a tormented neediness. In the filmmakers' interpretation, there's a suggestion that White suffered from murderously repressed homosexuality. With James Franco, Emile Hirsch, Diego Luna, and Alison Pill.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In wide release.)

MOSTLY MARTHA

Many movie lovers automatically turn off when they hear the phrase "German romantic comedy": that genre and that national cinema haven't mixed well since Billy Wilder fled the Nazis. But this one, from 2001—which was remade here, in 2007, as "No Reservations"—has a certain low-key dazzle, much of it provided by the astounding actress Martina Gedeck, who turns what many Americans might deride as a "high-maintenance woman" into a figure that any man of substance should want to know. Martha has had to struggle to achieve and maintain her position as the mistress of her own first-class restaurant kitchen, and seems not to realize how much of her passion, goodness, and intellect she has poured into her work. But we do. Gedeck embodies vibrancy and valor with conviction. She turns out to be an admirable mother to an orphaned niece, but their relationship resists sentimentality—as does Martha's love life. The writer-director, Sandra Nettelbeck, gives Martha two potential mates, an architect with two kids and an outgoing Italian chef named Mario. As played with a sublime light warmth by Sergio Castellitto, Mario convinces Martha that, despite their temperamental, almost elemental differences, he appreciates her for who she is. They make beautiful soup together. In German.—*Michael Sragow* (Rubin Museum of Art; Jan. 30.)

NOTORIOUS

A scrambled bio-pic about Christopher Wallace, who became known as the rapper the Notorious B.I.G., or Biggie Smalls, and who recorded two great albums before he was shot dead, at the age of twenty-four, in 1997. The director, George Tillman, Jr., not only jumps around restlessly in Biggie's life; he jumps, in vintage MTV style, from angle to angle within a given scene, and the moods never settle in—we never understand why Biggie makes one decision or another. The heavyset rapper Jamal Woolard, who plays Biggie, comes off as a man with a gentler face and temper than the original, but when Woolard sings, changing his flow to match Biggie's, he's powerful and convincing. The songs are the best thing in the movie. With the charming Derek Luke, as Sean (Puffy) Combs, Biggie's producer, and Anthony Mackie, as the brilliant but erratic Tupac Shakur.—*D.D.* (1/26/09) (In wide release.)

REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

Commuters in identical gray suits and hats pour like lava through Grand Central Terminal and settle in to work in vast open floors with shaded glass partitions. Cigarettes are lit and furiously smoked; Martinis, consumed by the bucketful, launch anxious bouts of adultery and heartrending quarrels. We're in the fifties, the alleged graveyard of American hope, and Frank (Leonardo

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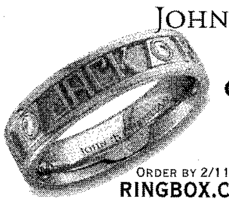

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DiCaprio) and April Wheeler (Kate Winslet) are a suburban couple who have the freedom to do nothing but tear each other apart. It turns out that there's a gap between the Wheelers' soaring spiritual ambitions and their actual talents and interests. Their dilemma is grounds for pathos, or possibly for satire, but is it grounds for tragedy? The story, sour and relentless, works toward a gruesomely unhappy ending. Winslet plays April as a will-driven hysteric; DiCaprio gets the externals right, but he's a little afraid of revealing the depths of Frank's shallowness. Watching the two go at each other may be cathartic for some, but it shouldn't be confused with movie art. Sam Mendes directed; Justin Haythe adapted Richard Yates's celebrated 1961 novel.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/08) (In wide release.)

THE SECRET OF THE GRAIN
In the French port of Sète, near Montpellier, on the Mediterranean coast, a large family of Tunisian immigrants and their French-born children gather together to eat and quarrel in a heated atmosphere of rivalry and sexual jealousy. The family patriarch (Habib Boufares), a laid-off dockworker desperate to leave something for his children and grandchildren, attempts to impress the local French nabobs with a couscous restaurant that he opens on an old ship. The director, Abdellatif Kechiche, works with a handheld camera that messily captures the abundant family life; he digs a story out of the flux, and, in the last forty minutes or so, the suspense is terrific. With the beautiful Hafsia Herzi, whose heroic dancing not only saves the restaurant from opening-night disaster but is guaranteed to alter the erotic tastes of Westerners who have made a fetish out of a flat, lean belly. In French, Arabic, and Russian.—*D.D.* (1/12/09) (IFC Center.)

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE
An eighteen-year-old Muslim tea-boy named Jamal (Dev Patel), born and raised in the poverty of Mumbai, teeters on the verge of fame and fortune. A nation awaits. Such is the old-fashioned, sentimental cliffhanger to which the screenwriter Simon Beaufoy and the director Danny Boyle have, with unembarrassed drive, committed themselves. Jamal is a contestant on the Indian edition of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?," and the suspicion of the police—who, in an ill-judged prelude to the story, hold and torture him—is that he must have cheated. His response is that experience alone, whether wretched or comic, has by chance furnished him with the correct answers, and the bulk of the film, constructed from flashbacks, proves his point. The style, seen previously in "City of God" and other movies, is what you might call urban-manic: heated performances, even hotter colors, and camerawork that vies with the editing for nerve and speed. The lad at the center of it all is actually on the dull side, but the energy around him—not least in the dance sequence over the final credits—is difficult to resist.—*A.L.* (11/24/08) (In wide release.)

WALTZ WITH BASHIR
A documentary cartoon may sound like an oxymoron (is it not the duty of animation to elasticize reality?), and Ari Folman's film is indeed impossible to classify. Buried within it is the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps of West Beirut, in 1982, but much of the movie is composed of dreams and distant recollections, as Folman—who was serving in the Israel Defense Forces at the time—questions his former colleagues and slowly feels his way toward the horror. There are passages of unexpected lyricism, including the Fellini-like vision of a giant waterborne nude, as well as a very funny pastiche of no-budget German pornography, but the harsh editing and the gloomy hues leave you in no doubt as to the sombre purpose of Folman's quest. Whether that justifies the last-minute switch of direction, in which he reverts to actual news footage of the slaughter, is open to debate; the head-on vigor of his animation is already graphic enough. In Hebrew, German, and English.—*A.L.* (1/5/09) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

WANDA
The actress Barbara Loden's only film as a director, from 1970, is an authentic, original masterpiece. She stars as the title character, a woman reduced to anomie by the drudgery and banality of life in a coal-mining town. Having left her husband and children, she rides off with a buttoned-down, steely-eyed drifter (Michael Higgins), who, unbeknownst to her, is a robber on the run. Loden's depiction of Wanda's degradation, resistance, and resignation blends intense psychological realism with a spontaneous, quasi-musical mastery of form. Her grainy images, with their attention to place, light, and detail, have an intimate, sculptural texture; they give matter a soul. If there is a female counterpart to John Cassavetes, Barbara Loden is it.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade; Jan. 30-31.)

WENDY AND LUCY
Wendy (Michelle Williams), a drifter passing through Oregon, is neither crazy nor criminal, but she has less sense than a quiet creature in the woods. She merely exists, harmless but obdurate, a mostly silent, very young woman whose only allegiance is to her yellow-brown mutt, Lucy. She's infuriating, but Kelly Reichardt's movie, for all its morose impassivity, is beautiful and haunting. As Williams plays her, Wendy is full of feeling, and has a solid, fleshy presence. She won't go away, and Reichardt immerses her in Oregon's summer light, its forests as seen from a moving train. The cinematography is so tactile that even a scraggly building has the power to move us with its purchase on our attention. A contemplative movie like this one clears all the whirling, meaningless imagery out of our heads.—*D.D.* (1/26/09) (In limited release.)

THE WRESTLER
A straightforward tale, given tremendous extra punch by its leading man. Mickey Rourke, whose career was long ago laid to rest, rises again to play Randy (the Ram) Robinson, a wrestler whose own career has tumbled from a high of twenty years before. No one else, it seems fair to say, could have played the part; for one thing, no one but Rourke combines a gently spoken sweetness with so glazed and inflated a physique, together with a willingness to be treated by his peers like a veal chop. The scenes in the ring, in which Randy, despite a heart attack, struggles to prolong the dregs of his appeal, are often hard to take; even more agonizing are his attempts to forge enduring bonds with his estranged daughter (Evan Rachel Wood) and a tired stripper (Marisa Tomei). The film has a grainy, bloodied sadness that slips at times into the sentimental, but the director, Darren Aronofsky, knows precisely where the heart of the story beats, and that confidence is a refreshing change after the drippy meanderings of his previous film, "The Fountain." There is nothing less mystical, or more moving, than to watch the Ram reduced to serving at a deli counter: a good man at the end of the line.—*A.L.* (12/15/08) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

BRIDE WARS: In wide release. **HOTEL FOR DOGS:** In wide release **INKHEART:** In wide release. **PAUL BLART: MALL COP:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Imitations of Life," films by John Stahl and Douglas Sirk. Jan. 28 at 7 and Jan. 31 at 4:30: "When Tomorrow Comes" (1939, Stahl). ♦ Jan. 28 at 9 and Feb. 1 at 4:30: "Interlude" (1957, Sirk). ♦ Jan. 29 at 6:45 and Jan. 31 at 9: "Magnificent Obsession" (1935, Stahl). ♦ Jan. 29 at 9 and Jan. 31 at 6:30: "Magnificent Obsession" (†). ♦ Jan. 30 at 6:45 and Feb. 1 at 9: "Imitation of Life" (1934, Stahl). ♦ Jan. 30 at 9 and Feb. 1 at 6:30: "Imitation of Life" (1959, Sirk). ♦ "Goethe Institut Presents." Jan. 29 at 7:30: "Soccer as Never Before" (1970, Hellmuth Costard). ♦ Feb. 2 at 7:30: "La Habanera" (1937, Detlef Sierck, a.k.a. Douglas Sirk; in German). ♦ "Essential Cinema," films by Sergei Eisenstein. Jan. 31 at 4:45: "Strike" (1925; silent). ♦ Jan. 31 at 7 and 8:45: "Battleship Potemkin" (1925; silent). ♦ Feb. 1 at 5: "Old and New" (1929; silent). ♦ Feb. 1 at 7:30: "October" (1928; silent).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Jan. 28-29 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20: "Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles" (1975, Chantal Akerman; in French). ♦ Jan. 30 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 10:15 and Jan. 31-Feb. 5 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "The Panic in Needle Park" (1971, Jerry Schatzberg). The 7:40 screening on Jan. 30 will be introduced by the director, the co-star Kitty Winn, and the co-screenwriter Joan Didion.

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 2: The films of Jacques Doillon. Feb. 3 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Jacques Doillon: Words and Emotion" (1998, Anne Brochet and Françoise Dumas; in French) and "Family Life" (1985, Doillon; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Through April 5: "After the Revolution: Cuba on Screen." Jan. 30-Feb. 1 at 11 A.M.: "One Way or Another" (1977, Sara Gómez; in Spanish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Jan. 30-31: "Control" (2007, Anton Corbijn). ♦ Special screening. Feb. 2 at 7: "FTA" (1972, Francine Parker), introduced by Jane Fonda. ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Feb. 3 at 8: "Must Read After My Death" (2008, Morgan Dews), introduced by the director.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Batiste Madalena and the Cinema of the 1920s." Jan. 28 at 1:30: "The Unknown" (1927, Tod Browning; silent). ♦ Jan. 29 at 1:30: "The Volga Boatman" (1926, Cecil B. De Mille; silent). ♦ Jan. 30 at 1:30: "The Mysterious Lady" (1928, Fred Niblo; silent). ♦ "Korean Films Made During the Japanese Occupation." All films are in Korean. Jan. 28 at 6 and Jan. 31 at 1: "Spring in the Korean Peninsula" (1941, Lee Byeong-Il). ♦ Jan. 28 at 8 and Jan. 31 at 3: "Straits of Chosun" (1943, Park Ki-Chae). ♦ Jan. 29 at 8 and Feb. 1 at 1: "Fishermen's Fire" (1939, Ahn Chul-Yeong) and "Volunteer" (1941, Ahn Seok-Young). ♦ Jan. 30 at 8 and Feb. 1 at 3:30: "Sweet Dream" (1936, Yang Ju-Nam) and "Military Train" (1938, Seo Kwang-Je). ♦ Jan. 31 at 5: "Angels on the Street" (1941, Choi In-Kyu). ♦ "Global Lens 2009." Jan. 29 at 6: "What a Wonderful World" (2006, Faouzi Bensaïdi; in Arabic). ♦ Jan. 30 at 6: "Possible Lives" (2007, Sandra Gugliotta; in Spanish). ♦ Jan. 30 at 8: "Mutum" (2007, Sandra Kogut; in Portuguese). ♦ Jan. 31 at 7: "Those Three" (2007, Naghi Nemati; in Farsi). ♦ "A Salute to Stuart Oderman." Jan. 29 at 6: "Broken Blossoms" (1919, D. W. Griffith; silent), with live piano accompaniment by Oderman. ♦ "American Politics: From the Archives." Jan. 31 at 7: "The Great McGinty" (1940, Preston Sturges). ♦ Through Feb. 28: The films of Angela Ricci Lucchi and Yervant Gianikian. Feb. 2 at 7: "Ghiro Ghiro Tondo" (2007), followed by a discussion with the filmmakers. ♦ "Oscar's Docs, 1946–56: Optimism and Adventure!" Feb. 2 at 8: "Kon-Tiki" (1950, Thor Heyerdahl; in Norwegian).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Jan. 30 at 9:30: "Mostly Martha" (†), introduced by the writer Amanda Hesser.

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Jan. 30-31: "Fast Times at Ridgemont High" (1982, Amy Heckerling).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—Through Feb. 5: "*Positif* Celebrates American Cinema." Jan. 30

at 2 and Jan. 31 at 4:30: "Fingers" (1977, James Toback). ♦ Jan. 30 at 4 and Feb. 4 at 8: "Blue Collar" (1978, Paul Schrader). ♦ Jan. 30 at 6:15 and Jan. 31 at 2: "Wanda" (†). ♦ Jan. 30 at 9 and Feb. 2 at 1: "The Honeymoon Killers" (1970, Leonard Kastle). ♦ Jan. 31 at 6:45 and Feb. 3 at 1: "True Confessions" (1981, Ulu Grosbard). ♦ Jan. 31 at 9:15 and Feb. 4 at 3:45: "Another Day in Paradise" (1997, Larry Clark). ♦ Feb. 2 at 3:15: "Keane" (2002, Lodge Kerrigan). ♦ Special event. Feb. 1: "Alvin Ailey Day."

READINGS AND TALKS

SYMPHONY SPACE
The Upper West Side institution kicks off "The 1939 Project," a series of readings, talks, and concerts focussing on culture toward the end of the Depression, with a talk about the events of that seminal year, featuring the novelist E. L. Doctorow, the historian Robert Dallek, and the talk-show legend Dick Cavett. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Feb. 2 at 7.)

BOWERY POETRY CLUB
The poet Thomas Lux gives a close reading of Theodore Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz," and then reads from his own work. (308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. 212-614-0505. Feb. 3 at 6:30.)

"POEMS & PINTS"
The monthly reading series sponsored by the Poetry Society of America and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, at Fraunces Tavern, continues with Dana Goodyear (a writer for this magazine) and Matthew Zapruder. (54 Pearl St. For more information, call 212-254-9628. Feb. 3 at 6:30.)

"TENEMENT TALKS"
The historian Samuel Kassow talks about Emanuel Ringelblum and the Oyneg Shabes archives, the subject of his Holocaust study "Who Will Write Our History?" (Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 108 Orchard St. 212-982-8420. Feb. 3 at 6:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

GROUNDHOG DAY
Pennsylvania's Punxsutawney Phil (a.k.a. Seer of Seers, Sage of Sages, Prognosticator of Prognosticators, and Weather Prophet Extraordinary) may get the lion's share of the media attention, but New Yorkers have their own resident rodent expert. Chuck G. Hogg lives at the Staten Island Zoo, and he'll be making a morning appearance on Feb. 2 at 7:30. If he sees his shadow, it's six more weeks of winter. If not, spring is coming shortly. (614 Broadway. 718-442-3100.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
In uncertain times, the supreme quality and craftsmanship of Old Master works shine all the more; their value—if not necessarily their price—seems beyond doubt these days, and the auction houses are putting their best foot forward. After a sale of drawings (Jan. 28), **Sotheby's** leads off its selection of paintings (Jan. 29-30) with a magisterial canvas by Turner, "The Temple of Jupiter Panellenius," one of the works in the artist's retrospective at the Met last year. This Romantic landscape is balanced by the frank, self-satisfied postures shown in two Frans Hals portraits ("Portrait of a Man Holding Gloves" and "Portrait of a Woman Holding a Handkerchief"), which remind us of the solid, tangible pleasures of prosperity. Self-satisfaction, with a twist, is also the theme of Goya's subtly wicked portrait of a tight-lipped Austrian prince and ambassador to Spain ("Portrait of Prince Alois Wenzel von Kaunitz-Rietberg"). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** Old Master sales are book-ended by a two-part auction of paintings, drawings, and sculpture from a private collection (Jan. 27 and Jan. 30), a highly personal group selected by the influential art historian Julius Held. In its main sale of the week (Jan. 28), the house will offer five watercolors by Turner spanning his career, three of which, including the late picture "The Brunig Pass from Meiringen, Switzerland"—a whirlwind of diaphanous color and light—were once owned by John Ruskin. Other highlights include circular paintings, or *tondi*, from the studios of Fra Filippino Lippi and Botticelli, while the recession special is a lot containing no less than twelve paintings of sibyls (female oracles) by Zurbarán (and his studio), made during the mid-seventeenth century, another period of financial blight. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Phillips** sheds light on trends in South Asian contemporary art (and reflects on the region's relationship with the West) in a selling exhibition entitled "The Audience and the Eavesdropper: New Art from India and Pakistan" (Jan. 28-Feb. 14). (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

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ULLA PUGGAARD

A "West Side Story" revival, at the Palace.

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
NICKELS AND DIMES
Feb. 6-March 5

Hollywood made terrific entertainment, and sometimes even art, from a wide range of Depression-age miseries. Film Forum offers a month of topical classics from the thirties—both celebrated ones, including Howard Hawks's "Scarface," King Vidor's "Our Daily Bread," and "42nd Street," and such rarities as Frank Capra's "Platinum Blonde," starring Jean Harlow, and Frank Borzage's "Man's Castle." (212-727-8110.)

ART
THE WAR AT HOME
Feb. 11-March 22

For his upcoming project "It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq," at the New Museum, the British artist Jeremy Deller—who won the 2004 Turner Prize for his film about Crawford, Texas—has invited veterans, writers, scholars, and Iraqi citizens to discuss the war with museum visitors. (212-219-1222.)

NIGHT LIFE
SIMONIZED
Feb. 13-14

The "A.I.A. Guide to New York City" says, of the Beacon Theatre, "Go in, even if you must attend a concert that deafens you," calling its Greco-Deco-Empire interior "second only to that of Radio City." The theatre, which first opened in 1928, recently underwent a seven-month renovation, and it reopens with the non-deafening singer-songwriter Paul Simon. (800-745-3000.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
TRY, TRY AGAIN
Feb. 16-May 8

"Il Trovatore," Verdi's lurid if melodically abundant melodrama, was badly served at the Met by Graham Vick's 2000 production. A new effort, directed by David McVicar, features Marcelo Álvarez as Manrico. (212-362-6000.)

THE THEATRE
WHEN YOU'RE A JET
Feb. 23

Arthur Laurents, at the age of ninety-one, fresh from directing Patti LuPone in "Gypsy," revives "West Side Story," the 1957 Bernstein-Sondheim-Robbins musical, for which he wrote the libretto. Matt Cavenaugh and Josefina Scaglione star, at the Palace. (212-239-6200.)

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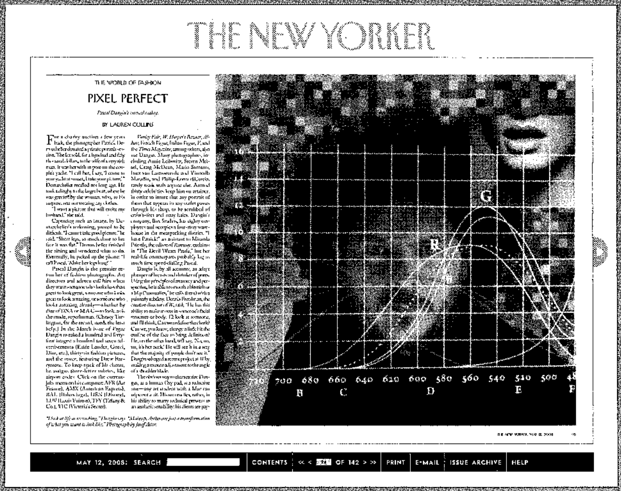
THE NEW YORKER

THE WORLD OF FASHION

PIXEL PERFECT

BY LAUREN COLLINS

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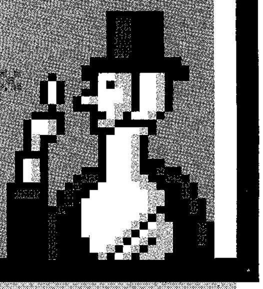

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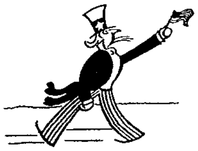
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE PRESIDENT'S HERO



A couple of decades ago, when Barack Obama was on a break from Harvard Law School and visiting friends in Chicago, he carried around a copy of "Parting the Waters," the first volume of Taylor Branch's magnificent trilogy about Martin Luther King, Jr., and the rise of the civil-rights movement. Obama was staying with Jerry Kellman, his mentor during his three years as a community organizer on the South Side. Kellman said that he greatly admired Branch's book. Obama brightened and said, "Yes, it's *my* story."

Mind reading is a decidedly low form of journalism. Yet it is not hard to imagine that as Obama emerged into the noonday light last Tuesday to receive the oath of office, as he left the Capitol's warm interior and saw before him the carpet of humanity stretching down Capitol Hill to the monuments miles distant, that he made a mental leap to Marian Anderson's defiant concert at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939, to the March on Washington that King led twenty-four years later, to the entire story of a struggle that he was too young to join but came to claim as his own.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

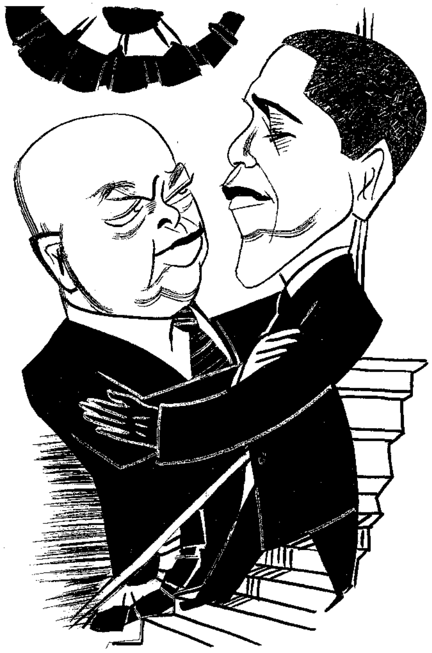
After absorbing the thudding roar from the Mall, Obama glanced to his right. He spotted there on the steps, a few feet away, John Lewis—squat, bald, hatless—the eleven-term representative of Georgia's fifth congressional district and the only one of the speakers at the March on Washington still among the living. Obama bent to embrace him.

"Congratulations, Mr. President," Lewis whispered in his ear.

Obama smiled at the sound of that and said, "Thank you, John. I'll need your prayers."

"You'll have them, Mr. President. That, and all my support."

At the March on Washington, King's speech was the most eloquent, Lewis's the most radical. Lewis was just twenty-three at the time, the leader of the Student Nonviolent Coördinating Committee. In the original draft of his speech, the demand for racial justice and "serious revolution" was so fearless that, in the last minutes before the program began, Dr. King, Bayard Rustin, Roy Wilkins, and other movement organizers negotiated with him to remove any phrases that might offend the Kennedy Administration. Lewis planned to say, "We will march through the South, through the heart of Dixie, the way Sherman did. We shall pursue our own 'scorched earth' policy and burn Jim Crow to the ground—nonviolently. We shall fragment the South into a thousand pieces and put them back together in the image of democracy." He had to lose the bit about Sherman's army, but the rest of the text, capped by its final warning—"We will not be patient!"—left no doubt about Lewis or about the audacious generation he represented.



Two years later, in Selma, Lewis led a march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge straight into a blockade set up by Alabama state troopers. The first nightstick came down on Lewis's skull. The troopers used whips, horses, a hose wrapped in barbed wire. Along with Lewis, ninety demonstrators were injured. At the White House, Lyndon Johnson watched it all on television and deepened his resolve to push the Voting Rights Act. The day before Obama's Inauguration, which marked what would have been King's eightieth birthday, Lewis told a visitor at his office in the

"Need anything from the bank?"

• •

Cannon House Office Building, "Barack Obama is what comes at the end of that bridge in Selma."

Inaugural weekend was "bewildering" to John Lewis. "It is almost too much, too emotional," he said. Preaching at the Shiloh Baptist Church on Ninth Street N.W., Lewis had told parishioners that he would have thought that only a "crazy" person would predict the election of an African-American President in his lifetime, but now he was sure that the masses on the Mall would be joined by the "saints and angels": by Harriet Tubman and Carter G. Woodson, Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois, Nat Turner and Frederick Douglass, John Brown and Sojourner Truth.

For hours, Lewis greeted constituents at his office and handed out inaugural tickets. Then he set off to visit the Mall, moving, it seemed, in a daze of unreality. He could not quite believe the size of the crowds gathering so early—especially the great numbers of African-Americans, young and old, many of them from distant places.

Lewis grew up in Pike County, Alabama—the Jim Crow South. His parents picked cotton, peanuts, and corn; the children left school at harvest time to join them. Their small house had no electricity or running water. Their lives, according to the dictates of Alabama law after the collapse of Reconstruction, were stripped of democratic rights and human possibility.

Lewis read his Bible and on Sundays tuned in to WRMA, the gospel station out of Montgomery, to hear the Soul Stirrers and the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi. Lewis was a soulful, intelligent, and eccentric child. When religious feeling washed over him, he began visiting the henhouse out back to preach to the Dominiques and the Rhode Island Reds. The chickens composed his ministry: Lewis baptized new chicks; he raised and fed them; he buried the dead under a mound of wildflowers. As Lewis wrote many years later in his autobiography, "Walking with the Wind," he was a lonely searcher learning compassion for God's creatures.

One Sunday morning in 1955, when he was fifteen, Lewis listened to a sermon on WRMA called "Paul's Letter to the American Christians." The story was of Paul's call to brotherhood. The preacher was a young Baptist in Atlanta named Martin Luther King. Two years later, Lewis made contact with King and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and, in no time, King became his mentor and his friend. As a teen-age seminarian in Nashville, Lewis attended nonviolence workshops, organized lunch-counter sit-ins, and took part in the first Freedom Rides, constantly risking arrests, harassment, and beatings.

As Lewis walked around the Mall last week, shaking hands, posing for hundreds of photographs, a young African-American introduced himself as the police chief of Rock Hill, South Carolina. "Imagine that," Lewis said. "I was beaten near to death at the Rock Hill Greyhound bus terminal during the Freedom Rides in 1961. Now the police chief is black."

At the beginning of the 2008 campaign, Lewis, a Clinton-family loyalist, sided with Hillary—as did the majority of African-Americans. By February, however, when it became clear to him and to so many others that Obama was not running a symbolic race, that he represented "a movement" and could win, Lewis had switched.

"Barack has lifted people," Lewis said, as he posed for pictures with some women from D.C. "Old people, young people, children, black and white. Look out on the Mall here. You can see it in their walk, can't you?"

One teen-age boy sweetly asked, "Mr. Lewis, my mama says you marched with Dr. King. Is that true?" Like an old fighter who is not displeased to recount ancient combat, Lewis nodded and said, well, yes he had, and perhaps for the five thousandth time he sketched the journey from Selma to Montgomery.

"Barack was born long before he could experience or understand the movement," Lewis said, heading back to the Capitol. "He had to move *toward* it in his own time, but it is so clear that he digested it, the spirit and the language of the movement. The way he made it his own reminds me of a trip I made to South Africa in March, 1994, before the post-apartheid elections. We met with a few leaders of the African National Congress—young people—and despite their age they knew everything about the late fifties and sixties in the American South, the birth of the civil-rights movement. They were using the same rhetoric, they had the same emotional force. One young South African actor got up and recited a poem by a black slave woman from Georgia! And that is the way it is with Barack. He has absorbed the lessons and spirit of the civil-rights movement. But, at the same time, he doesn't have the scars of the movement, because of how he grew up. He has not been knocked around as much by the past."

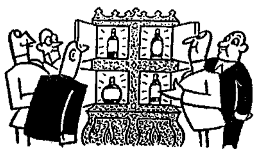
Obama's promise to shut down Guantánamo, to outlaw torture and begin reversing immediately some of the most egregious policies of the Bush era, gave Lewis hope that "the movement" had finally come to the White House.

"People have been afraid to hope again, to believe again," he said. "We have lost great leaders: John F. Kennedy, Martin, Robert Kennedy. And so people might have questioned whether or not to place their full faith in a symbol and a leader. The danger of disappointment is immense, the problems are so big. None of them can be solved in a day or a year. And that's the way it was with the civil-rights movement. This is the struggle of a lifetime. We play our part and fulfill our role."

At the luncheon following the swearing-in ceremony, Lewis approached Obama with a commemorative photograph and asked him to sign it. The President wrote, "Because of you, John. Barack Obama."

—*David Remnick*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA
GREEN CARPET



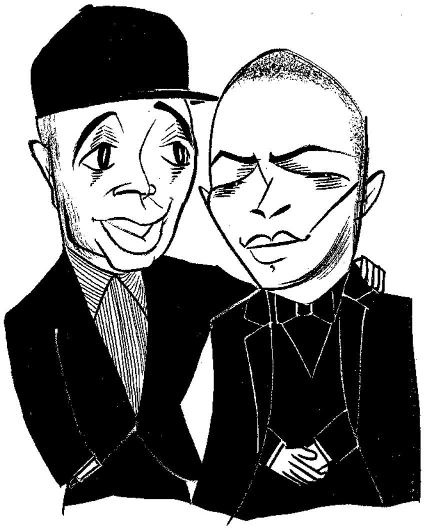
The carpet outside last Monday's Hip-Hop Inaugural Ball was not red but green, in honor of Heineken, one of the event's sponsors. The green also could have stood for the price of the ticket—five hundred dollars for general admission, twenty-five hundred for "Sky Level." The proceeds were promised to Russell Simmons's Hip-Hop Summit Action Network, a group that has spoken out about everything from ending the Rockefeller drug laws to defending hip-hop lyrics before the F.C.C. The ball was held at the Harman Center for the Arts, on F Street, where heated white tents had been erected to contain the green carpet and any overflow. Nick Cannon, a long white scarf around his neck, shook hands outside the main lobby. On the green carpet, Don King, in rhinestone-studded denim, posed in profile for the paparazzi. A few feet away, Simmons, the co-founder of Def Jam records, took questions. He wore a long dark jacket, a black Yankees cap, white shell-top Adidas, and a pin-striped shirt buttoned to the collar with no tie.

Upstairs, the V.I.P. area was called the Hennessy Lounge. African-Americans reportedly purchase as much as eighty per cent of the Cognac imported to the United States. Hennessy, knowing its customer, was premièring a limited-edition bottle "in honor of our 44th president," with a portion of the proceeds going to the Thurgood Marshall College Fund. Smiling women in black blouses served cocktails engineered with the Presidential hooch. A flat screen flashed images of the bottle. A row of models of indeterminable race, wearing black dresses, stood off to the side having their photographs taken with various guests.

Simmons ambled in with a small entourage, and the room got tighter. He pulled aside the rapper T.I. and talked to him about the importance of mentorship. In March, T.I. is expected to go to jail on federal weapons charges. He was to be honored at the ball for "bringing an awareness to this election season," according to his Web site. He introduced Simmons to a teen-age boy from Georgia whom he'd taken on as a mentee, along with a few others. "This is just one of them," he told Simmons.

Simmons had flown in from Utah, where he'd been screening a new movie about Run-DMC's late d.j., Jam Master Jay, and marketing SpongeBob diamonds, part of a jewelry line that he and his ex-wife had helped start. He stood next to a display of Hennessy 44 bottles and did a series of TV interviews, rattling off several packaged points. He called Obama's election a "shift in consciousness." He mentioned his own work on three elections. He talked up the environment and compared Obama's rise to Run-DMC's. "Nobody from the black congress believed," Simmons said. "I remember when Run-DMC was on MTV. Nobody else black was on there but Michael Jackson."

When he was done, he mentioned that Obama's security team had come by earlier to check the place out. "I don't think he's going to show up," Simmons said. But, he added, "I wouldn't expect John Kerry to come." Ushered onward by a handler, Simmons began making his way out. At nearly every step, he was stopped by an admirer and was asked to pose for a picture. He was tired, and his smile was work—the mouth forced to spread, the eyebrows at half-mast. Once outside the lounge, he darted down several flights of stairs, past different ballrooms with different d.j.s playing different music, until he was in the basement. He went through a door with his name taped to the front, into a makeshift dressing room, and introduced an Abercrombie & Fitch model named Katie Rost, his date. "She's smart and she writes," he said. "She went to Boston University and got a degree in journalism." (Later, on her blog, Rost quoted from T.I.'s acceptance speech at the ball: "So I'mma thank Him for everything. . . . I'mma thank Him for making me sell crack. I'mma thank Him for making me have shoot-outs. I'mma thank him for allowing me to watch my partners die in my arms, so I'd be fearful enough for my life and paranoid enough to go out



Russell Simmons, T.I.

and cop machine guns and silencers so I catch a fed case and I have to put up $3 million for my bond . . . just so I be validated enough to get out there and touch the youth because they know that I done been through it.")

In 2008, Simmons took a leave from H.S.A.N. and went around the country campaigning for Obama. The President's relationship with hip-hop is complicated. Nas hosted an official event for the campaign, and the President's staff has noted that he has some Jay-Z on his iPod. But he was forced to denounce the rapper Ludacris for writing a song with the lyrics "Hillary hated on you, so that bitch is irrelevant." The inaugural concert featured performers of all strains of American music, but, aside from Will.i.am singing a duet with Sheryl Crow, there were no rap performances.

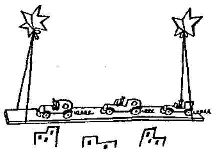
Simmons talked a bit about Obama and hip-hop. "He embraced it as much as a politician can," he said. "I was amazed by his willingness to put some of us in the room. If I was running for President, I wouldn't want me to speak for me, so I was amazed. He let those of us who love him work for him."

He also mentioned hosting Louis Farrakhan at his first Hip-Hop Summit: "I'm a big fan of Minister Farrakhan, but I was concerned that my association with him might rub off on Obama."

Simmons had two more balls to get to, but he was considering heading to bed instead. He then ticked off his various projects—working with 50 Cent on the Jam Master Jay film, pushing Governor David Paterson toward retroactive repeal of the drug laws, teaching yoga classes sponsored by Smartwater. He said, "Every morning, I stand on my head for five minutes."

—*Ta-Nehisi Coates*

HERE TO THERE DEPT.
STEP ON IT



Two Fridays before the Inauguration, Sophia Lear, a twenty-three-year-old editorial assistant at *The New Republic*, was at her friend Isaac Chotiner's apartment in Dupont Circle, watching the movie "Cocktail," when she got a text message from a number she didn't recognize. "It was, like, 'Do you want to take Monday off work to drive in Obama's motorcade?' " Lear recalled. "I went, 'Yes, absolutely. But who is this?' " The sender turned out to be Jonny Dach, an acquaintance from the Yale *New Journal*, who was working on the Presidential Inaugural Committee. He told her to e-mail her Social Security and driver's-license numbers. Lear did, and she e-mailed her boss to ask for the day off. He wrote back, "How could I say no? It's a fine Washington adventure."

At ten-thirty on Monday morning, Lear, who has long brown hair and an unfussy, hippie-ish demeanor, reported for duty at the Obama transition office, on Sixth Street. She was wearing jeans and carried a copy of "The Mill on the Floss." (She had been warned that there would be downtime.) After passing through something like airport security—bag screen, metal detector—she was sent to a basement garage, where there were rows of black Chevy Suburbans and about ten Secret Service agents holding automatic weapons. An Obama aide handed her the key to her vehicle: a rented blue Dodge minivan. She had been told that she'd be transporting high-level staffers. (Before the swearing in, volunteer drivers were often used by the P.I.C., to save money.) At first, no one could get the key to work. A staffer appeared, and he asked if she could drive for the rest of the week. Lear told him, "I have a job," but he pressed her. "I was, like, 'What's going on here? How could you possibly be so desperate for somebody to drive in the motorcade?' "

The Secret Service guys told her the drill: it would all happen fast; the Suburbans would pull out, one of them with Obama inside, and she would follow right behind. One of the agents had a Starbucks drink, and he offered Lear a sip: six espresso shots on ice. "He told me he gets it three times a day," she said. They gave her one piece of driving advice: "Don't hit anything, and drive like you stole it."

After an hour and a half, Lear's passengers arrived: General James L. Jones took shotgun; Lawrence Summers and two men she didn't recognize got in back. No one spoke. "The ride there was so awkward," Lear said. "I was racking my brain about some introduction I could make." Finally, someone brought up the World Economic Forum, in Davos—General Jones said he guessed he was going; Summers said it sounded fun—and Lear was listening closely until she realized, "O.K., I need to focus on not crashing General Jones and Larry Summers and all these important people! I need to execute this task properly." She concentrated on the driving: a real-life Grand Theft Auto. Secret Service agents leaned out of the Suburbans in front of her, holding their guns. There was no stopping at red lights—policemen blocked the intersections—and no other cars in the street.

The motorcade arrived at the Mexican Cultural Institute on Sixteenth Street. The passengers got out, and Lear tried to read her book. But mostly, she said, "I sat in the car for about two hours and texted everybody I know." She asked for suggestions for ice-breakers to use with Jones. Her dad wrote, "How about 'At ease, General!'?" Her mom sent a list of "possible entry points": Georgetown basketball (Jones played for the Hoyas), biking, and Paris (they'd both spent time there). Most of her journalist friends recommended mentioning books or articles they'd written.

When Lear's charges returned, they were chattier, especially Summers. "He definitely filled the vacuum," she said. "He was babbling on and on and was very gossipy." At that point, Lear made her conversational move: she asked Jones if he'd seen the profile of him in a recent issue of *The New Republic*. He seemed a little surprised. "He was, like, 'Oh, I'll have to look that up.' "

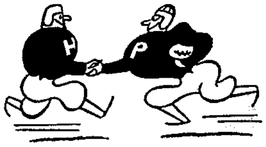
When they got back to the garage, Jones turned to Lear and said, "Thank you so much for driving us. I hope to see you again soon." She was thrilled, but she'd decided that she couldn't miss any more work, and so she recommended her friend Chotiner for the next day's duties. (On Tuesday, the van carried Rahm Emanuel and John Podesta, who were accompanying Obama to the Capitol for a meeting with senators about the bailout. On the way back, Chotiner tried laughing at one of

Emanuel's jokes. He recalled, "I thought maybe it would, you know, ingratiate me in the conversation." It didn't.)

On Inauguration Night, Lear attended a party thrown by Google. She was introduced to a member of Obama's staff, and she told him her motorcade story. He seemed unimpressed. "He told me, 'Yeah, they transitioned to the official Presidential motorcade today.' As in 'That was the last chance you'll ever get.' "

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

GRIDIRON DEPT.
THIRD-STRING RUMMY

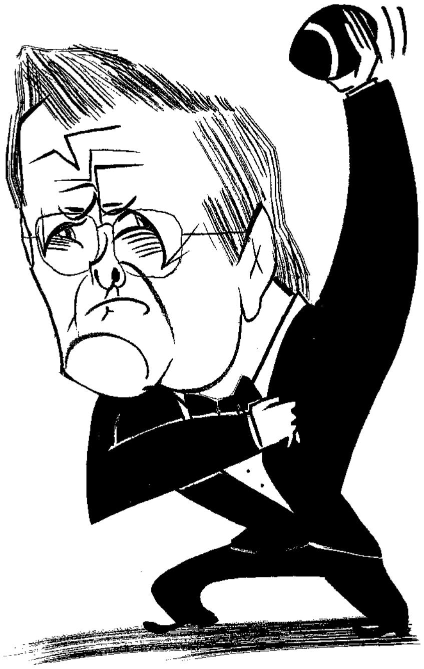


By last Thursday night, with the changing of the guard in Washington complete, some star power had returned to New York, and there, in the grand ballroom at the Waldorf-Astoria, sat an assortment of media and political figures in tuxedos, such as might have been found at one of the lesser inaugural balls: Stone Phillips, Iowa governor Chet Culver, "Hill Street Blues" star Ed Marinaro, Donald Rumsfeld. Ambassador Thomas Stephenson had just flown in from Lisbon. Ted Kennedy couldn't make it, but he sent a letter to be read on his behalf by the TV newsman Jack Ford. Five hundred dollars a plate, recession be damned. The Reverend Jason Pankau, a personal life coach from Stamford, offered an invocation from Proverbs 27:17: " 'As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.' We all share the common bond of having been sharpened . . . on Ivy League football fields."

If the election of President Obama was supposed to signal the end of clubby, fraternity-style rule and usher in a new, thin-necked, cerebral era, you wouldn't have known it from the Ivy Football Association Dinner, which, like a congressman's reëlection bid, occurs every two years. "It is thought that the most unique aspect of Ivy League football is that many of the players go on to become nationally preeminent in their fields," the invitation read. Each school's football alumni association honors one of its own, and the names of some past honorees—Hank Paulson and G.E. chairman and C.E.O. Jeffrey Immelt, both Dartmouth offensive linemen, and both in the news—suggested an ongoing cultural relevance.

Governor Culver's father, John, a former Democratic congressman and senator, sat on the stage, as Harvard's chosen representative, and, in recalling his first trip to New Haven, in 1949, even claimed Obama as a kind of honorary member of the tribe. "The Yale captain that game was Levi Jackson, the first black captain in the history of Yale in any sport," he said. "And I thought, How sad it was that he died just a few years ago and couldn't witness a graduate of Columbia University become the first black President of the United States." Ted Kennedy was Culver's teammate: a left end. "John was a fullback who loved to charge straight up the center of the line," the Senator had written. "He was the kind of politician who didn't change with the prevailing political winds."

Some of the speeches, as the evening dragged on, seemed almost to borrow from the rhetoric and themes of campaign season. "As a kid growing up in Perkasie, Pennsylvania, a tiny rural town in the eastern part of the state, a dream like this was so foreign it wasn't even a dream," Jake Crouthamel, Dartmouth class of 1960, said. "And it all began by chance and the fickle fingers of fate."



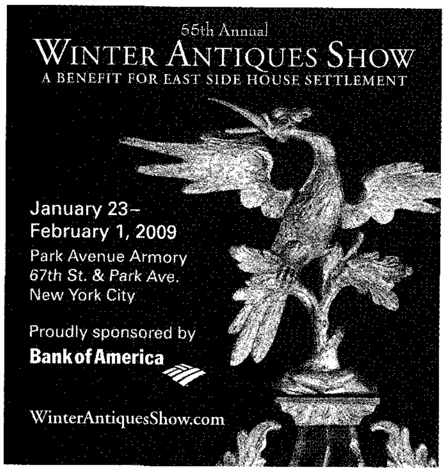
Donald Rumsfeld

The ESPN host Chris Berman introduced Steve Jordan, a fellow Brown grad, and the lone black honoree—as well as the most accomplished player, a six-time Pro Bowl tight end. "This has been an absolutely awesome week for me," Jordan said, citing the Inauguration. "Monday, the Martin Luther King holiday, also coincided with my twenty-fourth wedding anniversary. . . . And, of all things, the Arizona Cardinals will compete in the Super Bowl." (Jordan is from Phoenix.)

Rumsfeld, Princeton's man, spoke last. "I did have very serious reservations about whether I should accept your invitation," he said. "This evening, of course, is about football—real football, varsity football." Rumsfeld was the third-string quarterback on Princeton's freshman team in 1950. "In the very last game, in the very last minute, I heard this crusty old coach . . . 'Where's that little guy? Let's put him in before the game's over,' " he recalled. The following year, he joined the lightweight team, limited to players weighing less than a hundred and fifty pounds, and switched to tackle: "It made a little guy feel big." Rumsfeld, known more for his wrestling, was now the littlest man on the stage, and even his parting shot, about R.O.T.C., had a humble, valedictory tone. "To his great credit, our new President, Barack Obama, during his recent campaign stepped forward and said with clarity that he supported the return of military programs to university campuses across the country," he said. "I find that enormously encouraging, and God bless him for saying it."

The football players gave Rummy a partial standing ovation, and the younger men in the room began assembling in clusters for post-game celebrations, in which old sporting rivalries promised to trump professional and political distinctions. "It's kind of sad," a Yalie, now a banker, said, of Princeton's choice. "I know they try to get accomplished people and everything, but you'd think they could find an actual varsity football player."

—*Ben McGrath*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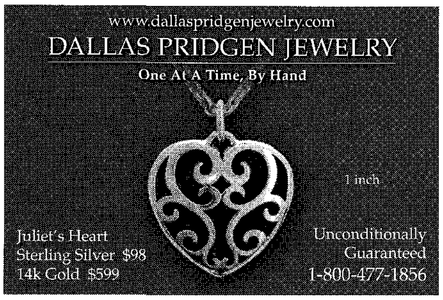
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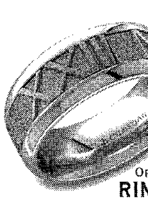
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ANNALS OF POLITICS

THE WIZARD

Before there was a black American President, black America had a president.

BY KELEFA SANNEH

Booker T. Washington was already a celebrity—a self-made man, and the spokesman for black America—when he arrived at the White House on October 16, 1901, for a dinner with President Theodore Roosevelt. They had plenty to talk about: Washington was a great orator and conversationalist, and he had become one of the President's most valued advisers. But, almost before the plates were cleared, the form of this meeting had overshadowed its content. Washington had earned his reputation as a racial moderate by assuring white people that he wouldn't press for social equality, but this dinner looked an awful lot like a strike against segregation; the reported presence of the President's glamorous seventeen-year-old daughter, Alice, intensified the scandal. Southern newspapers raised the alarm; the Memphis *Scimitar* announced, with impressive certainty, that the dinner was "the most damnable outrage which has ever been perpetrated by any citizen of the United States."

Both men survived the evening, but it was not soon forgotten. In his third autobiography, "My Larger Education," Washington tells of a railway trip he took through Florida sometime later. At a stop near Gainesville, a white farmer shook his hand, exclaiming, "You are the greatest man in this country!" Washington demurred and suggested that Roosevelt was the greatest American, but the farmer was having none of it. With "considerable emphasis," he said, "I used to think that Roosevelt was a great man until he ate dinner with you. That settled him for me."

Washington loved this story—he sent a newspaper account of it to Roosevelt, who is said to have "laughed uproariously"—perhaps because it reminded him that he lived, and thrived, in a world that didn't quite make sense. He was born in slavery, in Virginia, in 1856, which meant that he was old enough to remember the morning his family was freed, nine years later. At sixteen, he enrolled in Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, one of the Negro schools that were springing up in the postwar South; his remarks at his graduation ceremony, three years later, were singled out for praise in the New York *Times*. In 1881, at the age of twenty-five, he became the first principal of a newly established Negro school in Tuskegee, Alabama, and, like many college presidents before and since, he discovered that the job required constant fund-raising. He spent most of the rest of his life giving speeches, building up his own reputation (quickly) and the Tuskegee Institute's endowment (slowly). Washington's message—that economic progress was the true engine of uplift for black America, and that black political agitation was "the extremest folly"—was engineered to meet the demands of his time, not the demands of history. (It was also meant to persuade rich people to write checks; Washington's critics never let him forget that his temple to self-help was built on handouts.) He spent his life in search of consensus, not controversy, and historians have been fighting over him ever since.

In 1972, Louis R. Harlan published the first half of his meticulous two-volume biography, "Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901." It began with a sneer. "Booker T. Washington has been the schoolbook black hero for more than half a century," Harlan wrote, and his book aimed to change that, although there was nothing polemical about it. Harlan, a historian at the University of Maryland, brought an exacting skepticism to his task, subjecting myths and anecdotes to forensic examination. (Although Washington remembered taking sacks of corn to the mill as a boy, Harlan concluded that the task "probably actually" fell to his older brother John. And, after quoting a starstruck reporter who described him as "tall, bony, straight as a Sioux chief," Harlan has-

WALDON FAWCETT/COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

tened to add that Washington was "not actually tall, bony, nor very straight.") Harlan, who edited fourteen volumes of Washington's papers, used private correspondence to complicate—and sometimes undermine—his subject's public image. He clearly admired the skill and strategy behind Washington's rise: the way he got his white neighbors to view his booming black school as a source of regional pride; the way he flattered Northern liberals and soothed Southern segregationists with the same folksy speeches. But, in Harlan's view, the great race man was also an "artful dodger," and a not entirely honest broker, forever spying on his critics, punishing his enemies, rewarding his friends, and bribing the Negro press. He got so good at telling people (especially white people) what they wanted to hear that he often forgot what he wanted to say.

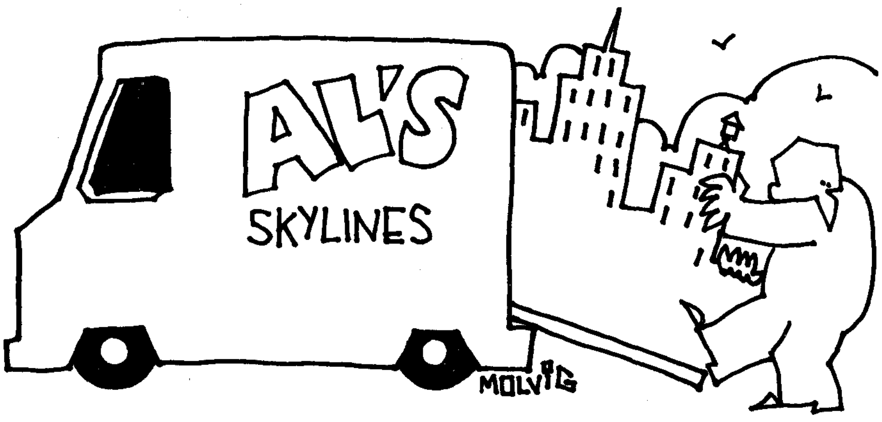
WALDON FAWCETT

Washington fended off black rivals and white supremacists with almost equal fervor.

The fact that Booker T. Washington's tactics were finely tuned to the temper of his times helps explain why they were so discordant with the times that followed. Washington's reasonableness came to be viewed as his mortal sin—he was often portrayed as the enemy of black activism. But these days, when the "schoolbook black hero" is Martin Luther King, Jr., Washington is less threatening, and more likable, than he once was: a slave turned mogul whose life story is easier to admire now that his political philosophy has been eclipsed. And, in the age of Obama, Washington seems more than ever like a precursor: a beloved barrier-smasher, sensitive to the rigorous demands of being America's favorite black person. In short, Washington seems due for reappraisal, and in "Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington" the historian Robert J. Norrell aims to push him back up onto his pedestal—or, at any rate, to pick him up off the floor.

No one can deny that Washington had an extraordinary knack for cultivating white people. A few years after the end of the Civil War, he worked as a houseboy for a transplanted Vermonter named Viola Knapp Ruffner, who was reputedly a demanding mistress. The thoroughness of his housework won her over, and she became one of his first boosters, although it's not clear whether she gave him her blessing to quit her household and set out for Hampton. Washington never knew his father, who was almost certainly white, but he found a surrogate at Hampton: Samuel Armstrong, the school's founder, who had commanded black troops as a Union officer in the Civil War. Washington adopted Armstrong's credo—work hard, don't complain—as his own, and when the Alabama state commissioners in charge of Tuskegee wrote Armstrong in search of someone to lead their new school, he replied with a terse but nonetheless extravagant letter recommending Washington as "a very competent capable mulatto, clear headed, modest, sensible, polite and a thorough teacher and superior man. The best man we ever had here." It turned out that this new school in Tuskegee was essentially a vacant lot with a two-thousand-dollar budget. (A local tinsmith had promised to swing the black vote to the Democrats in exchange for a new state-sponsored Negro institute.) So Washington went to work rounding up students, who had to double as construction workers. This was to be a hybrid school, teaching academic subjects (many of the graduates became teachers) alongside agriculture and industry; students not only built the campus but also, after a series of disastrous kiln experiments, learned to make their own bricks, with some left over to sell to the locals.

With an emphasis on discipline (another legacy of General Armstrong's) and practical knowledge, Tuskegee was meant to be an oasis of stability in a shifting world. The prolonged death throes of slavery had been followed by the accelerated



rise and fall of Reconstruction: black men, some formerly enslaved, were swept into political office and then swept out almost as fast, as if history had suddenly been speeded up and then thrown into reverse. In his speeches and on campus, Washington stressed the importance of tangible things that changed slowly or not at all: how to plant vegetables, how to make a mattress, how to use a toothbrush (he was obsessed with toothbrushes). He could sound less like a man desperate to change the world than like a man determined to outlast it. Although he was married three times, by all accounts happily, and widowed twice, his voluminous archive contains, in Harlan's words, "not a single love letter, nor a cry of joy." Yet most people who met him praised his warmth, which was sometimes indistinguishable from obsequiousness. In "Up from Slavery," his best and most popular book, he told a joke about a "coloured man in Alabama" who mysteriously (and conveniently) found his true calling on a sweltering day, and cried out, "O Lawd, de cotton am so grassy, de work am so hard, and the sun am so hot dat I b'lieve dis darky am called to preach!" He saw nothing wrong with summoning up an old stereotype—the shiftless "darky"—even while asking his people to leave it behind.

In the course of a few days in 1895, Washington was transformed from a respected educator into a star. He had been selected to give a speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, which must have been a considerably more exciting event than the name suggests. The audience was mixed (although not, of course, integrated), and Washington deftly combined black pride with Southern pride. "Cast down your bucket where you are," he said, urging blacks to make the South their home, and urging Southern whites to view blacks as their greatest economic resource. He invoked the faithful slaves who were willing to die to protect their masters, and then, before the warm feeling had dissipated, he delivered a striking threat that might have ended a less nimble speaker's career: "We shall contribute one-third to the business and industrial prosperity of the South, or we shall prove a veritable body of death, stagnating, depressing, retarding every effort to advance the body politic." Although blacks were losing the right to vote, he urged his black listeners to begin "at the bottom"—with farming, not politics.

But what reverberated most was a simile he had used before, one that linked the reality of segregation to the dream of black advancement. "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress," he said. He was rewarded with applause, hurrahs, and women's handkerchiefs, and the speech soon passed into legend. Like any great orator, Washington made people cheer for themselves: white listeners could celebrate their own open-mindedness, and also black acquiescence to segregation; black listeners could celebrate the promise of "progress," and also the not insignificant fact that throngs of white people were cheering a black man.

The speech gave Washington fame, and the success of Tuskegee—a tidy, bustling, peaceful black campus, in the heart of the former Confederacy—gave him credibility. He became a fixture at jubilees and conventions, and on at least one occasion, in 1899, he shared a dais with Theodore Roosevelt, who was elected Vice-President the next year, and wrote Washington to invite him to pay a visit. Harlan reports that Emmett Scott, Washington's shrewd secretary, added a triumphant annotation when he passed on Roosevelt's letter: "You have him sure!" After the assassination of William McKinley, in 1901, Roosevelt became President, and he came to rely on Washington as a loyal and discreet guide to the treacherous racial politics of the South, thereby establishing Washington as one of the nation's most influential gatekeepers: for office-seeking judges and tax collectors alike, his endorsement was the one that counted. (He fought an epic battle to get a black man named William D. Crum appointed Collector of the Port of Charleston.) Washington was useful to Roosevelt partly because he seemed to speak, gently and patiently, for black America—though, in fact, black America's doubts were growing. A rabbi in Cambridge was "astounded" to learn, after praising Washington during a lecture in 1903, that many blacks in the audience considered him a reactionary, or a sellout.

One of the letters of congratulation that Washington received after the Atlanta speech came from a young professor named W. E. B. Du Bois, who commended him for "a word fitly spoken." Du Bois was a much worse organizer than Washington, but a much better writer, and while Washington was building his political machine Du Bois was building a devastating critique of him. In fact, Du Bois's critique, as presented in "The Souls of Black Folk," is probably better known today than the argument it was meant to rebut. In language both elegant and slippery (he would often extrapolate from Washington, and then pick apart his own extrapolation), Du Bois firmly rejected what he saw as a three-pronged program: "industrial education, conciliation of the South, and submission and silence as to civil and political rights." He called Washington's speech the "Atlanta Compromise," and the name stuck; the word "compromise" has colored interpretation of Washington ever since.

Certainly, Washington's method depended upon the good will of Southern white people, which he was always quick to postulate, even in the face of contrary evidence. And his critics, not least Du Bois, relished the opportunity to portray Washington as the Great Accommodator, forever doing the bidding of powerful white men. Norrell himself has written in the past about "Washington's compromise." But in his new biography he pushes back against the phrase, calling it "pejorative." In his view, Washington didn't trade political rights for economic opportunity, because there was nothing, really, to trade: "Washington was in effect conceding what was already lost—independent black political power—in order to reduce white hostility." Norrell reframes the picture of Washington by emphasizing the extent and ferocity of that hostility; he shows how Washington and his critics conspired to make the Tuskegee project seem less controversial, and less brave, than it really was. Washington's home-state rival, William Hooper Councill, the president of Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical College, could be even more conciliatory to whites; he once said, "God bless the white woman! I know she wants me hung when I assault or insult her and she is right!" After Washington's dinner with Roosevelt, Councill dismissed it as an "accident"—which sounds like something Washington might have said if Councill had beat him to the White House.

In Norrell's telling, Washington seems less like a grand racial bargainer and more like a man under siege, projecting strength and flexibility because he knew how precarious his empire was. "Washington never admitted the full extent of continuing white opposition to black education," Norrell writes. From the start, Tuskegee alarmed whites who thought that educating Negroes was futile, or dangerous, and on at least one occasion the campus came close to disaster. A few months before the speech in Atlanta, a black lawyer fleeing a lynch mob arrived at Washington's door; he helped the man to safety but later claimed that he had refused the man's pleas for help—a lie that may well have saved the campus, and not a few lives. While Washington was whispering in President Roosevelt's ear, he became the main topic of discussion during the successful congressional campaign of Tom Heflin, who was later elected to the Senate. Heflin, an ardent racist whose district included Tuskegee, accused Washington of working for his opponent. "If Booker interferes in this thing there is a way of stopping him," he said in a stump speech, adding, "We have a way of influencing Negroes down here." Heflin evidently wasn't bluffing: while he was a congressman, he shot a black man during an argument in a streetcar. In Mississippi, two black men walking home from one of Washington's speeches were lynched near the railroad tracks; apparently the killers wanted Washington to see the bodies as he rolled out of town.

Washington often replied to critics like Du Bois by saying that they didn't understand the realities of life in the South. (Du Bois was from Massachusetts, though he lived for a time in Atlanta.) Indeed, Du Bois's attacks can sound as if they had been launched from a different universe. In "The Souls of Black Folk," he wrote that Washington's emphasis on self-help "has tended to make the whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro's shoulders and stand aside as critical and rather pessimistic spectators." But, in the context of post-Reconstruction Alabama, getting white folks to "stand aside" has to be seen as one of Washington's greatest achievements. Nor was Washington inclined to trumpet his more "progressive" deeds. Washington helped finance legal challenges to black disenfranchisement in Alabama, but he knew the risks of exposure, so he instructed his associates to write in code: "C" meant a hundred, "D" meant dollars, and Washington was referred to as His Nibs, which was slang for a pompous ass, or as the Wizard. These two epithets were often used by Washington's enemies, and he must have taken great pleasure in co-opting them.

While Washington earned white allies through charm and diplomacy, he sometimes shored up his black support through less delicate means. After he was reprimanded in the pages of a new magazine, *The Voice of the Negro*, in 1905, Washington targeted the editor, J. Max Barber. Washington put pressure on the publishers, who were also his publishers, and had his allies help spread the word that Barber was a coward, because he had—quite reasonably—fled Atlanta during a race riot. When Barber tried to get a teaching job at a trade school in Philadelphia, Washington blocked him by writing a scathing letter to one of its trustees. (Barber eventually found a less stressful existence, as a dentist.)

In 1906, when Washington's detractors were gaining strength, he made secret arrangements to buy a controlling interest in Chicago's leading Negro paper, the *Conservator*, which had been critical of him. (As it happens, Washington's habit of buying or bribing dissenting newspapers was a large part of the argument against him.) Emmett Scott monitored the progress of this newly pro-Washington newspaper, partly because he wanted to make sure that the transformation wasn't too fast or too drastic. In a letter, he explained, "Quiet effort is much more satisfactory in every way than that which carries around a 'brass band' to accomplish its results." The same advice might have helped Norrell, Washington's self-appointed defender, whose book might be more persuasive if its aims were less obvious. He seems faintly embarrassed by Washington's lifelong use of deception, and he spends a lot of time making excuses. After conceding that Washington had "little tolerance for criticism from blacks," he offers a rationale: "He thought it was offered in bad faith and that it undermined the larger cause of black progress." Maybe so. Or maybe he just knew which fights he could afford to pick.

Norrell concludes, rather too triumphantly, that creeping black disenfranchisement "did not defeat Booker Washington." True enough, but the reverse is equally true, and somewhat more important. In the event, Washington fell victim to his own singular success. By courting Theodore Roosevelt and earning his trust, Washington became the unofficial President of Negro America, and so when the "mutual progress" he had promised didn't arrive—when blacks were thrown off the voting rolls and purged from the Republican Party, when President Roosevelt dismissed a hundred and sixty-seven black soldiers in Brownsville, Texas, after the murder of a white bartender—Washington was unofficially impeached. By the time he died, in 1915, he was a popular but no longer dominant figure, and Du Bois and the N.A.A.C.P. were on the rise: the civil-rights century had begun. The fact that Washington was part of the last generation to have been born in slavery eventually came to seem like a mark of both obsolescence and authenticity. Du Bois, near the end of his life, rebuked a young student who sought to use Washington's name as an insult. He said, "Don't you forget that that man, unlike you, bears the mark of the lash on his back."

Norrell calls Washington a "heroic failure," a description that Washington himself would have abhorred: for him, as a pragmatist and a man of action, a "heroic failure" was a contradiction in terms. (This was precisely his argument against Du Bois's principled but uncompromising approach.) In truth, it is easier to root for Harlan's Washington, a cunning and ruthless strategist who fought white supremacists and black rivals with nearly equal fervor. Norrell's advocacy leads him to emphasize how constricted the man's choices were, how reactive his maneuvers. It's a defense, but it's a diminishment, too.

He also scants Washington's radical legacy. Despite Washington's carefully crafted image of moderation, there was indeed something radical about his belief in progress through the creation of black institutions, and his influence lived on in the unlikely form of Marcus Garvey, the back-to-Africa black nationalist, who sent a series of fan letters to Tuskegee near the end of Washington's life. In "The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual" (1967), the scholar Harold Cruse noted Washington's influence on Garvey, and he observed that Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam "carried out Booker T. Washington's philosophy of economic self-sufficiency and self-help more thoroughly than any other movement." Even Harlan, who was never the anti-Washington partisan that Norrell makes him out to be, eventually warmed to his subject. In 1983, he published the second volume of his biography, which won a Pulitzer Prize. In the preface, Harlan adopted a more sympathetic tone. He wrote that Washington's program "gave purpose and dignity to black working-class lives of toil and struggle," and he marvelled at "the number and diversity of those he enlisted in his coalition."

Washington may have been famous for accepting segregation, but there's little evidence that he actually believed in it. Still, discerning Washington's true beliefs is a treacherous business, because his distaste for idealism often resembled a distaste for ideals themselves. He was acutely conscious that his achievements ultimately came at the pleasure of whites, and he was aware of his own limits: in a private letter declining an invitation to the founding conference of the N.A.A.C.P., in 1909, he seemed to step outside himself, writing, "There is a work to be done which no one placed in my position can do." His most implacable white critics sometimes saw him most clearly. The writer Thomas Dixon—"The Birth of a Nation," which was screened at the White House the year of Washington's death, was based on his novel "The Clansman"—complained that Washington was teaching his students "to be masters of men, to be independent, to own and operate their own industries," and "in every shape and form destroy the last vestige of dependence on the white man for anything." And the white educator Paul Barringer said that Negro education, even the seemingly inoffensive kind that Washington promoted at Tuskegee, was a "mistake," because "any education will be used by the negro politically, for politics once successful is now an instinctive form of warfare."

There was, after all, a certain incoherence—perhaps a tactical incoherence—in Washington's philosophy, which flowed from the assumption that education would make blacks less militant in pursuit of their rights. He claimed that the racial problems of America, and particularly of the South, would slowly work themselves out, but he also claimed that there would be hell to pay if anyone tried to hurry that process along. Although his optimism was discredited in his own lifetime, his pessimism still reverberates. The veiled threat at Atlanta—that blacks might turn out to be "a veritable body of death" in the American South—now seems a prophecy of the violence to come. Washington was right when he warned that black "agitation" would lead to misery and death and yet more hatred. He was wrong only to suppose that there was any alternative. ♦

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LETTER FROM TEHRAN

THE RATIONALIST

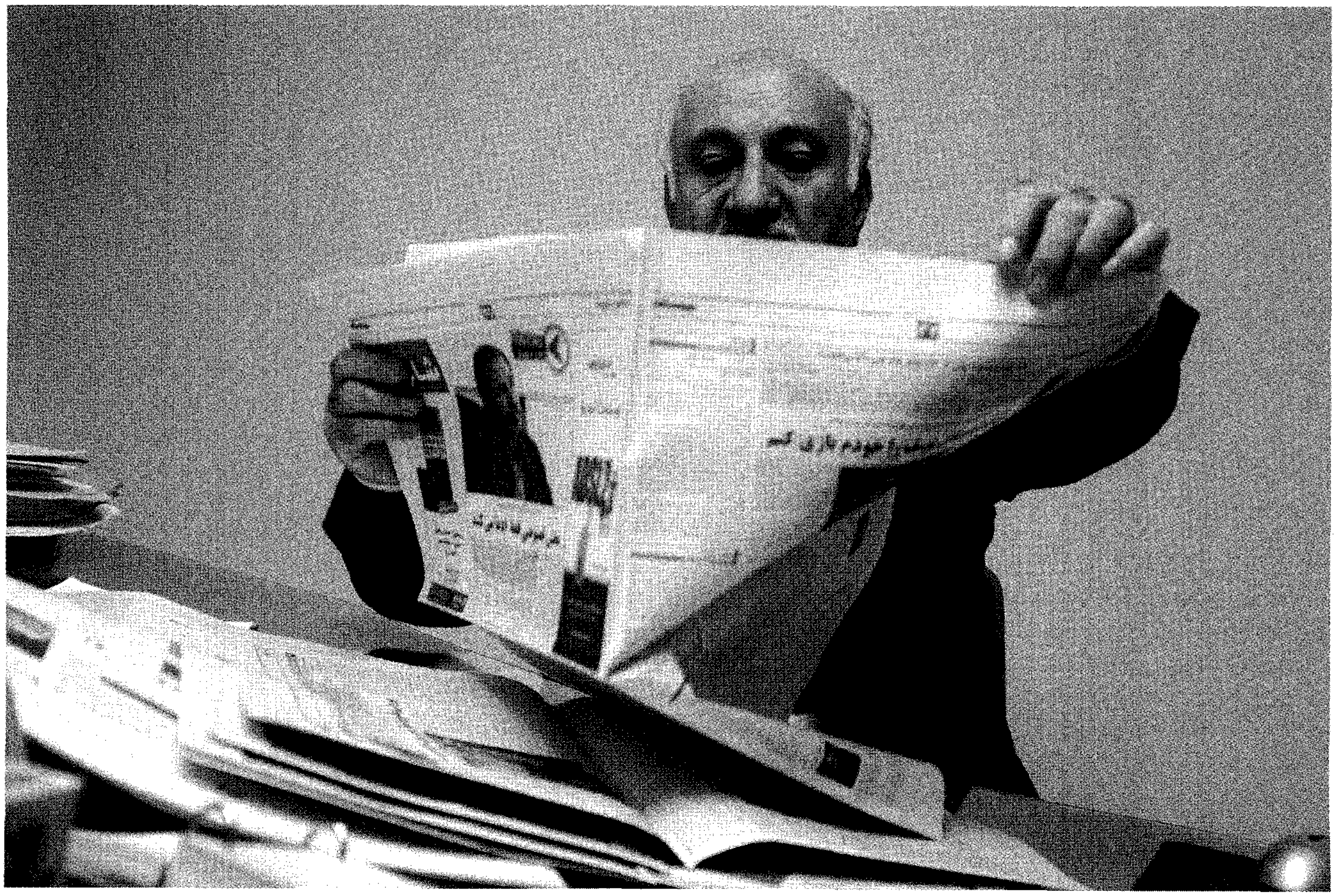
A dissident economist's attempts to reform the revolution.

BY LAURA SECOR

Not long ago, I visited the office of a financial consulting firm on a quiet dead-end street just north of the commercial center of Tehran. Several flights up, amid bare but light-filled rooms with worn nineteen-fifties-era office furniture, I met Mohammad Tabibian, Iran's foremost free-market economist and—though he is virtually unknown in the West—one of the country's most important reformers.

In the strange, tumultuous story of Iran's thirty-year-old Islamic Republic, the battle over free speech has captured the world's imagination, but the debate over free markets goes just as deep. Since the revolution, most industries in Iran have been owned either by the state or by enormous Islamic foundations that are connected to the ruling oligarchy and exempt from government oversight and taxation. While the Iranian government points to rapid economic growth, inefficiencies are rampant, and the traffic in exports, other than petroleum products, is anemic. Even traditional Iranian products like carpets have done poorly on the international market in recent years. (Between 1979 and 2003, the value of Iranian carpet exports dropped by more than half.) Iran's economy is sustained almost entirely by oil, which accounts for eighty-five per cent of all government revenues, and in the past five years this money has kept the country afloat as the price of crude reached record highs. Now that oil prices have fallen steeply, a crisis looms.

Since the early eighties, Tabibian and other trained economists have advised the government to dismantle trade barriers, drop price controls, and force companies such as Iran Khodro—the troubled state-backed automaker—to compete or perish. But the government, in its various incarnations, has not listened. The current President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was elected in 2005 on a promise to distribute Iran's oil wealth downward, has shrugged off expert economic advice in favor of grandiose gestures toward the poor. Upon taking office, he promiscuously handed out grants and subsidies; when these were not approved by the state budget office, he simply ordered the banks to issue more currency. He injected billions in oil revenues directly into the economy, dipping into the country's savings to do so. Liquidity increased by nearly forty per cent in the space of a year. Iranians, lacking incentives for investment, used this cash to buy imports, which buried local industries and sent prices soaring. Already on the rise worldwide, inflation in Iran skyrocketed. Within a year of Ahmadinejad's election, the inflation rate was the fourth highest in the world, after



MAGNUM

"They called us traitors," Mohammad Tabibian says. "We had all kinds of problems." Photograph by Thomas Dworzak.

Zimbabwe, Uzbekistan, and Burma; by the summer of 2008, it topped twenty-eight per cent. Meanwhile, Ahmadinejad slashed interest rates, a move that encouraged lending, pushed the country's fragile banking sector to the edge of ruin, and contributed to a surreal housing bubble in Iran's cities. For each of the past two years in Tehran, real-estate prices have more than doubled.

Tabibian, who was trained at Duke University, has little patience for economic policies driven by demagogy. "You can't find the things we are doing in Iran anywhere in the world," Tabibian said. In 2006, he says, he became the first professor to be purged by the regime from Iran's educational system. Other academics have been fired for demanding democracy or human rights; Tabibian was "retired" for supporting free enterprise. Critics have argued that his proposals undermine Iran's revolutionary principles, but Tabibian remains steadfast in his belief that a free market can co-exist with social ideals.

A solidly built man of sixty, with a round face and a trim gray mustache, Tabibian speaks fluent English with a lucidity and a directness that is startling in a culture marked by allusiveness and elaborate courtesy. In Iran the spectrum of economic thought, Tabibian joked, "runs from left to left." The economic populism of so-called conservatives, like Ahmadinejad, is not fundamentally different from that of reform-minded leftists: both factions talk of redistributing Iran's wealth, not of restructuring its economy. "The right elsewhere normally has to have a deep commitment to orthodox market principles," Tabibian explained. "That's not true here. Conservatives in Iran want the government to interfere in economics, to give them certain privileges in importing, exporting, banking, credit, government contracts, purchases. They are not free-market people at all. They are more like mercantilists." Tabibian's own thinking lies off this map entirely: he believes that markets are more trustworthy than the governments that try to control them and that the liberalization of Iran's economy is a necessary precondition for political freedom.

Free-market ideas—anathema at the time of the revolution—are finally becoming mainstream in Iran, Tabibian says, as the Islamic regime has repeatedly failed to find workable alternatives. This is happening, of course, at a time when the rest of the world is in retreat from the excesses of the unregulated market. Tabibian told me that he was not bothered by the negative example unfolding in the West. "We are on two different sides of the spectrum," he said. "You need more regulation and government intervention in financial markets to avoid moral hazard; we need less regulation and less government intervention to avoid moral hazard. You need, maybe, to increase public spending; we need to reduce public spending. You need to reduce the rate of interest; we need to increase it."

TRUE LOVE

Your sickness made me
a little sick, it's
true—I still
feel it
Mayakovsky got down
on his knees
and declared
his love
to his last
mistress
a few hours after
he'd met her
Remember me
at the hotel
in Paris,
on my knees
in the lift?
We're all the same
men of too much passion
and a little talent—
some a little more
than others
We fool ourselves
into thinking
we're strong
then complain
the rest of our lives
crippled by
the consequences

—*Barry Gifford*

Tabibian, who was born in 1948, grew up in an impoverished town outside Isfahan, in central Iran. At that time, under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Tabibian recalls, "poverty was a rule, well-being an exception." Tabibian and his family were among the exceptions: they owned considerable property. His parents were schoolteachers, who died in a car accident when Tabibian was sixteen.

"I had the chance to look at our surroundings without the preoccupation of day-to-day livelihood and the obscure view that comes with the pain and suffering of being poor," Tabibian said. "Some of my classmates died of ordinary disease, and many vividly suffered from malnutrition. The quality of housing in most neighborhoods was disastrous. This always preoccupied my mind. The common morality then in that town was that if the rich give part of their wealth to the poor, then the poor will be helped out. Many days and nights, in my imagination and daydreaming, I distributed the wealth of my family to the poor in the neighborhood. Always my calculation came to the same conclusion: that such an imaginary scheme, even if it happens, makes us poor and the neighborhood not much better off."

One day, on his way to school, Tabibian noticed in a bookstore window a thick new book for sale titled "Economics." It was a word he had never heard before. Tabibian asked his literature teacher what it meant. "He said it meant using your money wisely," Tabibian told me. "I thought the phrase he expressed was more often true by default. Everybody knows how to use their money wisely if they've got some." When he went home that night, Tabibian put the question to his father, who said he wasn't sure but he thought that economics had something to do with the creation of wealth.

The next day, Tabibian went to the bookstore and pulled the book from the shelf. "It was full of graphs, tables, formulas, and lengthy arguments," he said. "I noticed that the subject of creation and distribution of wealth is no simple matter. I thought, That is what I need to learn."

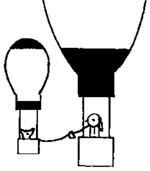
Tabibian later realized that the book was a translation of the 1948 introductory-economics textbook by the American neoclassical economist Paul Samuelson. By then, Tabibian was majoring in the subject at Shiraz University. He went into the field, he told me, "hoping that someday I would help find solutions for the misery and deprivation of many around me."

Tabibian shared this ambition with the generation of Iranian intellectuals, students, and other revolutionaries who toppled the Shah, in 1979. At that time, Tabibian was studying for his Ph.D. in economics at Duke. He was a devout Muslim and a member of the Islamic Students Association, which united Iranian expatriates across Europe and North America. The revolution was a powerful tug: expatriate scholars were pulled back into Iran, which they found in a heady state of utopian promise and practical disorder. "All projects were stopped," Tabibian recalls. "The factories were closed. The ministries were in chaos. The systems in the old administration were not there anymore. Everybody was engaged in revolutionary activities, slogans, and shouting."

Someone had to keep the economy and the basic structures of the state from collapsing, and that job fell to the students returning from abroad. Iranian students from M.I.T. took over the Ministry of Science; those from Stanford and the University of California system ran the Central Bank; those from North Carolina took over the Planning and Budget Organization, or P.B.O. "It was based on previous relationships," Tabibian told me. "You collected other friends who knew each other from abroad." For Tabibian, the key connection was to Mohammad Taghi Banki—a graduate of North Carolina State University and the head of the P.B.O. Banki hired Tabibian as the director of the agency's Macro Economy Bureau in 1981, at a moment when the P.B.O. was charged with the awesome task of drawing up an economic agenda for the world's first revolutionary Islamic state.

Founded in 1948, in the first years of the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's rule, the P.B.O.—a brain trust of technocrats—was a branch of the government that the government never fully trusted. The Shah came to find it politically unreliable and unresponsive to top-down control. Under the Islamic Republic, the same uneasiness was compounded by a structural problem: it was the P.B.O.'s job to convert idealistic talk of building an earthly paradise into revenues and expenditures, budgets and five-year plans. One of the agency's recent directors, Farhad Rahbar, put it this way: "The duty of the budget office is to allocate limited resources to unlimited demands. That is why nobody is satisfied with it."

Post-revolutionary Iran was infused with leftist ideology, in particular the work of a radical egalitarian Islamist thinker, Ali Shariati, without whose Marxist-Leninist reading of Shiite theology the revolution might never have taken place. ("Shariati was a confused person," Tabibian said bluntly. "His were an emotional type of arguments, provocative and revolutionary. But he had no clear idea about economics or politics. Unintentionally, he did a lot of disservice to this country.") Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the revolution's charismatic leader, was far from a leftist, but, breathing the same air, he arrived at a religious populism that made frequent reference to the righteous struggle of the oppressed against the ruling class. Although Islamists elsewhere had begun to develop a field of "Islamic economics," no comparable literature existed in Iran.



In 1982, Tabibian and a colleague travelled to East Germany, in search of ideas. "I went with an open mind," Tabibian told me. "It was mostly an academic trip, to see how things worked in Communist countries, neither to condemn nor to sympathize. Naturally, if I found something useful, I'd be happy to learn about it."

In East Germany, the Iranians took a two-month course in economic planning, and they visited factories and farms. What they saw, Tabibian told me, was shocking in its dysfunction—a foreshadowing of the system's imminent collapse. "Iran had good relations with the Soviet bloc, because we were in a revolutionary situation, and we could scrutinize their systems a bit more clearly, without much censorship," Tabibian says. "Even American economists had no clear idea at that time that it was so lousy. Nothing was working." Upon his return, Tabibian wrote a report for the Iranian government concluding that a command economy could not lead to growth, because it offered no incentive for innovation.

The new Iranian constitution, however, outlined an economy controlled largely by the state, partly by coöperatives owned by the public, and marginally by a private sector that would include the traditional merchant class of the bazaar. It was a fractured vision, and each of these power centers fought for control. Much of the country's wealth and industry ended up in the hands of a few giant, semi-private foundations that were opaque to the public and controlled by powerful clerics. Tabibian recalls, "There was a mix of rational and revolutionary attitudes and emotions—pushing, pulling, disputing, arguing."

Nothing illustrated this disconnect, Tabibian says, as clearly as the Islamic Republic's attitude toward prostitution. What should the state do about the "special ladies" who, under the Shah, populated the red-light districts of Iranian cities? He recalled that in Tehran the authorities resolved to pay salaries to the prostitutes so that they would cease their work and reform their lives. "And, at the same time, you'd hear in the news about women being stoned!" Tabibian marvelled. "The revolutionary court said to execute prostitutes. Nobody talked about the hundreds who were suddenly on the government payroll, doing nothing."

As Tabibian and his colleagues at the P.B.O. devised the country's first post-revolutionary development plan, Khomeini wanted the bureaucrats to discuss their ideas with the clergy in the holy city of Qom. Tabibian and his colleagues dutifully visited the seminary town, which is on the edge of a salt-marsh desert. "It was the first time I saw how the senior clergy lived, and it was very simple," Tabibian told me. "They are scholars of divinity, stricter than the average priests in the West. And they were nice people, gentle people, very concerned about morality and things to come from the other life." Their economic prescriptions, however, were vanishingly vague: society should be prosperous, people should not be greedy.

"We had to go back again to our textbooks, to read more deeply and more carefully," Tabibian recalls. "There was no way out except for using the experience of the world so far: the principles of competition, property, trade with the world, openness. The core of what the P.B.O. wrote in its plans, the sources were liberal ideas."

Yet Tabibian and like-minded technocrats found that these conclusions could not gain traction in Iran. During the nineteen-eighties, Mohsen Sazegara, who currently lives in Washington, D.C., ran Iran's largest conglomerate of state-owned heavy industries. He recalls that the ideological pressure on industry was for self-sufficiency: Iran's industries were not to look outside the country for parts, technology, labor, or capital. Sazegara was a committed revolutionary who had accompanied Khomeini on the plane that brought him back to Iran from his exile in Paris. But it did not take Sazegara long to conclude that a self-sufficient Iranian automobile industry, say, would harm the Iranian economy more than it would the economies of its Western rivals. "I raised this question after a while: '*Why* should we go and make a car in this country? It's not feasible, because the market is very small with respect to designing a new car, and we are not able to export them to other countries,'" Sazegara recalls. "But nobody cared. We invested millions of dollars, not only in heavy industries but in other branches of industrialization, and today many of those investments are bankrupt." By the end of his tenure, Sazegara, along with Tabibian, advocated privatization and participation in the global economy.

Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, an economist at Virginia Tech and a Brookings scholar, had returned to Iran after the revolution and worked in the Central Bank, where the regime had only one clear priority: to abolish the interest rate, which was deemed "un-Islamic." And yet, no matter which policy the Central Bank pursued, interest quickly reappeared. A bank branch in Tehran would place a red car on its roof and announce that all depositors would be entered into a lottery for that car—a strategy that allowed the bank to pay a variable rate of return on its deposits. Bankers even found ayatollahs who would issue fatwas in support of their schemes—at least until other, more powerful ayatollahs denounced them.

At the same time that Tabibian and his colleagues were struggling to implement liberal economic policies, other scholars and officials sought Islamic or socialist solutions to the country's problems. Parliament endlessly debated, but never approved, the P.B.O.'s development plan. The economists who argued for opening up the economy were accused of seeking to sell the revolutionary state to the capitalist West. "They called us traitors," Tabibian said. "We had all kinds of problems."

By 1983, Tabibian had concluded that the resistance to liberal economic ideas was overwhelming. He returned to Isfahan, where he spent the rest of the first post-revolutionary decade at a university, training young economists. Sazegara recalls that during those years he would fly to Isfahan and back in a single day, just to seek Tabibian's counsel. "He is the best economist in Iran," Sazegara said.

The Islamic Republic, convulsed with political violence, weathered international sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and an eight-year war with Iraq. The economy staggered into a profound recession. By 1988, the country's gross domestic product per capita was half what it had been in 1976. "Reversals of fortune of this magnitude in such a short period are rare in modern history," Salehi-Isfahani wrote in a recent article for the *Journal of Economic Inequality*. Industry and entrepreneurship withered. The ranks of self-employed service workers, like taxi-drivers and peddlers, swelled. By the war's end, in 1988, the Tehran-based economist and political analyst Saeed Laylaz told me, "Iran was a bankrupt country. No infrastructure, empty warehouses, empty stomachs, empty refrigerators, empty houses—empty everything."

Khomeini had promised his country social justice and "the rule of the oppressed." But he had also dismissively proclaimed that Iran did not have a revolution in order to lower the price of melons. "We were led to believe that there was a plan," Salehi-Isfahani says. "There wasn't. And that's how someone like Tabibian could enter and revolutionize their thinking."

In 1989, Khomeini died, and the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse. A more liberal economic plan finally seemed politically feasible. Iran's new President, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, reached out to the economists and industrialists who had been stymied for the past decade, and offered them the opportunity to clean up the country's contradictory goals and policies, scale back its inefficiencies, and lift the government's heavy hand.

At the time of Rafsanjani's election, Tabibian was a visiting scholar at Stanford. He got a call from another economist friend, Massoud Roghani Zanjani, who was then the head of the P.B.O. Tabibian recalls, "He said that the new President has a passion for the development of the country, and that his agenda is to adopt a more market-friendly reform program." Tabibian returned to Iran in 1991, becoming a deputy director of the P.B.O. He helped implement a radical plan for the country's postwar reconstruction—one that called for privatization, floating Iran's exchange rate, and eliminating price controls and subsidies. Salehi-

Isfahani told me, with a degree of awe, "It was not like one of the economic plans under Lenin that changed things maybe thirty per cent. It was a hundred-and-eighty-degree turn. They got rid of all the remaining rationing everywhere."

The economic-reform program became the signature of Rafsanjani's Presidency. One Iranian journalist in exile told me that Tabibian was "Rafsanjani's brain." Yet Tabibian's ideas were once again undercut by politics: Rafsanjani was widely believed to be floridly corrupt, bestowing favors on friends and relatives and undermining the public trust. Moreover, revolutionary idealism still permeated Iranian politics. The watchwords of the revolution had been social justice and independence from the imperial West. Many Iranians were convinced that Tabibian's reforms would curry favor with the West while inflicting pain upon the poor. This feeling persisted, even though the Rafsanjani administration protected key entitlements, such as subsidized food and medicine. As Salehi-Isfahani explained, "If you free up the price of bread, you hurt the poor. If you free up the price of steel, I'm not sure the poor are hurt."

As the price of oil rose, poverty declined, and the Islamic Republic made good on many of its promises, bringing electricity, safe water, health care, and education to the hinterlands. But at the same time the rich grew richer—conspicuously so, as the opening of the market made foreign luxury goods available in Iran for the first time since the revolution. New cars from Japan, Germany, and Korea, the sort that used to belong only to diplomats, became common in north Tehran. These visible inequities, combined with Rafsanjani's personal enrichment, made many Iranians resentful.

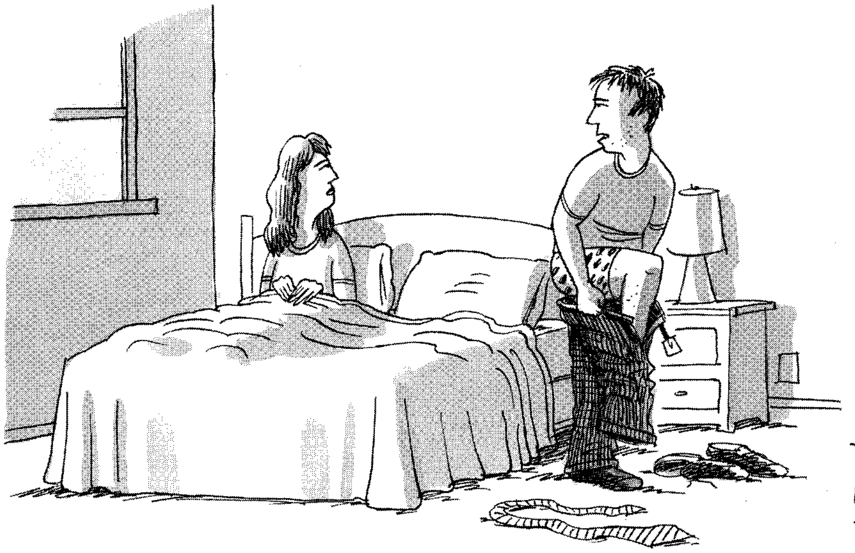
Tabibian had placed himself in a precarious position. For the good of his reform program, he had to make it clear to Iranians that bringing their economy into the global system had nothing to do with pressures or blandishments from the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, which promoted similar policies throughout the developing world. As Salehi-Isfahani recalls, "The World Bank misunderstood, and thought that Tabibian had seen the light. But he said, 'Don't come near me.' He did not want his program to be contaminated. He said to me, 'They just give us a bad name in front of the people.'"

Tabibian had not become a politician. His manner was still tough and direct, if flecked with humor, and he remained motivated by the singular commitment of his school days. "I made it clear that I believed in a free-enterprise system, a competitive market, and private-property rights, not as a matter of taste but because it is the only form of economic organization that leads to the well-being of the people," he told me. He took this stance in a country where claiming that inflation was the result of bad monetary and fiscal policy—rather than of the conspiracies of infidel profit-seekers—was considered anti-revolutionary. And so, he told himself, he had to patiently debunk competing hypotheses, harshly, if necessary, and without compromise, even "in the face of all ferment and revolutionary heat and passion and aversion from reason." He made himself available to explain economic theory to parliamentarians, clergymen, political activists, bureaucrats, and journalists. "This made enemies for me," he recalls. "But it was effective."

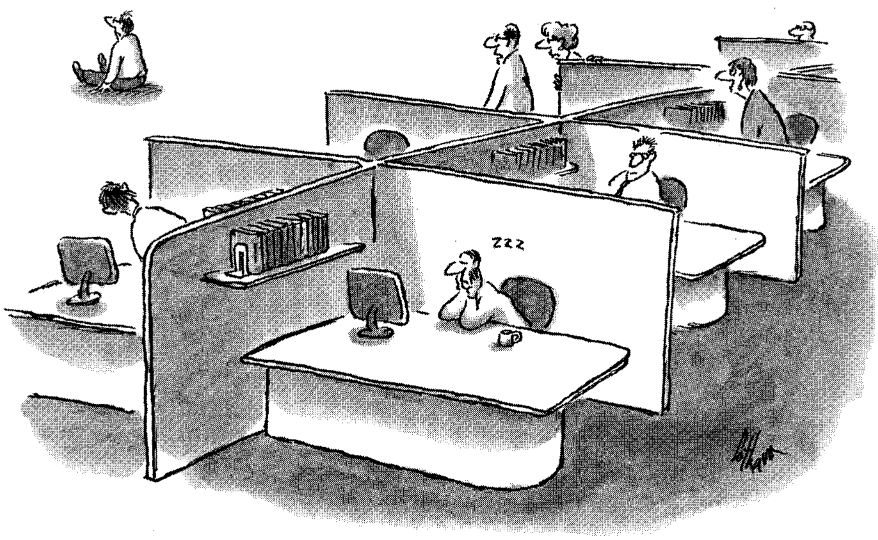
Meanwhile, for Rafsanjani, the reforms were a political catastrophe. The public recoiled at short-term shocks, such as the doubling of prices for gas, phone service, and public transportation, and at the cost of reconstructing the country after the war with Iraq. In 1993, the Rafsanjani administration bungled its effort to unify Iran's three foreign-exchange rates. Tabibian had long called for a single exchange rate determined by the market, but the government chose instead to adopt an artificially low rate. As he recalls it, "The Central Bank was in no position to support and maintain this politically determined foreign-exchange rate, and it did not serve the economy." The resulting debt crisis depleted the reserves of the Central Bank in about a month. The government bailed out the borrowers, rescheduling and paying off debts it could not afford. From nearly every quarter—the students and the clerics, the left and the right—came an overwhelming backlash. Under pressure, Rafsanjani reimposed price controls and halted privatization.

Tabibian resigned from the P.B.O. It was not in his nature to protest the government, which he felt had the right to choose its own policy. But, he recalls, "as an expert, I did not agree with the twist, and I was bitter." Iran's most ambitious experiment with liberalization was over.

In 1997, Rafsanjani was handily defeated by a Presidential candidate from the left: Mohammad Khatami. The incoming President, who served two four-year terms, introduced a new openness in Iranian politics and culture, but in the arena of the economy his administration lacked a clear direction. He tentatively resumed the reform program Rafsanjani had abandoned, but he quickly terminated any policy that was not well received by the public. Meanwhile, higher oil prices gave the illusion of prosperity:



"Look, you seem nice, and I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I was really drunk when we met, got married, and bought this house."



"We've got to try to coax him back into his enclosure."

poverty declined, inequality did not rise, and by 2005 the standard of living in Iran was the highest it had been since the mid-seventies. None of this, though, was a result of government strategy, which remained an ad-hoc affair.

The country's unemployment epidemic made clear that the economy still had festering troubles. Iran's population had doubled since 1979, and the revolution had made education available to more Iranians. But there was no role for these people in an economy that depended not on productive industries but on the dispensation of oil rents, which tended to create unskilled jobs. During Khatami's two terms, unemployment among illiterate men declined from seventeen per cent to eight per cent; among men with advanced degrees, it leaped from fifteen per cent to twenty-three per cent. (Among the most educated women, it was forty-three per cent.) The unemployment problem alienated Khatami's core constituency of educated young Iranians. Moreover, Khatami's penchant for lofty intellectual rhetoric signalled to many unemployed Iranians that he was out of touch.

Tabibian, after resigning from the P.B.O., withdrew to an institute that he had founded in the north of Tehran. Modelled on the graduate program in economics at Stanford, the institute, set in lush surroundings, was meant to lure Iran's finest students away from medicine and engineering and into the less prestigious field of economics. Salehi-Isfahani, who taught there one summer, recalls, "It had a gorgeous garden, trees, and it was full of very reasonable people." During Rafsanjani's second term, the institute received funding from the P.B.O. to analyze the national budget. But, in 2002, the left-leaning Khatami administration, uncomfortable with the institute's free-market orientation, cut off its funding, halted its research programs, and forbade it to admit students. Many faculty members left. Tabibian stayed, though he spent less and less time there.

Unemployment and inflation continued to dog the Iranian economy, and Khatami, embattled on other fronts, showed little will or aptitude for addressing Iran's systemic ills. In 2005, he was swept from power by the radical populist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who campaigned on the promise to end corruption and to deliver oil money to kitchen tables. His base saw him as the last hope for reclaiming the revolution for its foot soldiers: veterans of the war with Iraq; the armed young men of the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij militia, who felt snubbed by Rafsanjani's technocrats and Khatami's intellectuals; and the rural underclass, which survived on government subsidies and felt a kinship with Ahmadinejad, whose family migrated to Tehran from the village of Aradan.

Ahmadinejad didn't just campaign as a populist; he governed as one, doling out billions of dollars on his tours of the provinces. He was assisted immeasurably by the continuing oil boom; in 2006, revenues were almost fifty billion dollars. But Ahmadinejad's policy of funnelling this cash directly to his constituents backfired. The ensuing rise in inflation made food and housing—the two things nobody can do without—particularly expensive. The analyst Saeed Laylaz said of Iranians who rent their homes, "One night they slept, and they awoke in the morning and they realized that they were under the poverty line." Nearly seven hundred thousand urban Iranians fell into poverty in 2006. Inequality had worsened for the first time since the Rafsanjani reforms.

The economic frustration that Ahmadinejad tapped into with his 2005 campaign had turned strongly against him by 2008. In a parliamentary election last March, even Ahmadinejad's political allies could not run from his economic program fast enough. More than one member of the outgoing parliament, which had largely been controlled by Ahmadinejad's faction, told me that the job of the new parliament would be to force the President into accepting more sensible economic legislation.

In January, 2008, more than half of Iran's two hundred and ninety parliamentarians had signed a letter blaming Ahmadinejad's policies for rising unemployment and inflation. Mohammad Khoshchehreh, an economist at the University of Tehran, who was once a close political ally of Ahmadinejad, told me that the emerging consensus among scholars was that Iran should adopt a free-market economy with generous provisions for social security. "The government role should decrease, and part of it should be given to the private sector," he said. But, under Ahmadinejad, "the government takes control of everything." Hamid Reza Katuzian, a conservative member of parliament and another early supporter of Ahmadinejad's economic policies, said that the parliament should never have authorized the infusion of oil money directly into the economy. To resolve the unemployment and inflation problems, Katuzian said, Iran needed to renew its industrial base. It also needed an educational system that better matched its job market. "The problem is real—we cannot hide it," Katuzian told me. "We can all see it. Everyone is trying to solve it."

Everyone, perhaps, except Ahmadinejad. As criticism mounted, he became obdurate. In 2005, he appointed Farhad Rahbar—a hard-liner whose background was in intelligence—to head the P.B.O., which had been renamed the Management and Planning Organization, or M.P.O. One of Rahbar's first acts was to "retire" Tabibian from the institute he had founded. According to Tabibian, Ahmadinejad told Rahbar that the M.P.O. was filled with economic liberals who would "spray" him with their color, gradually seducing him with their heresies. These elements had to be resisted and purged, Rahbar was told.

Rahbar followed orders, forcing many experienced economists into retirement. But, like his predecessors, he faced a budget whose shortfalls could not be addressed with ideology alone. Rahbar started pressing Ahmadinejad to rein in the liquidity and embrace privatization. In due course, Rahbar, too, was fired. Through a mutual acquaintance, Tabibian sent him a message. "I told him, 'It's not the people who spray—it's the building.' "

In December, 2006, Ahmadinejad announced that he would disband the M.P.O.—the one government agency dedicated to solving Iran's economic problems. Bijan Khajehpour, an economist who runs a business-consulting firm in Tehran, told me that Ahmadinejad was looking for a symbolic gesture that would tell the people he planned to stand up to the rich and powerful. "But he chose the wrong institution, because this was one of the longest-lasting establishments in Iran with at least some degree of study and planning," Khajehpour said. "When you look at the department that replaced the M.P.O., it's called the Vice-Presidential Department for Strategic Planning and Control. That word—'control'—shows you what Ahmadinejad is about."

During the Rafsanjani era, many left-leaning student activists had bitterly protested the reforms that Tabibian pushed through. Yet, in 2006, when pro-democracy students demonstrated against Ahmadinejad, one of them waved a placard that read "Bring Back Tabibian."

Tehran's streets are dusty, dotted with buildings that are half built or half demolished, clanging with the wheelbarrows of work crews. The *joubs*—deep roadside gutters for the runoff from the Alborz Mountains, to the north—are murky and littered. But under the Islamic Republic, Iran has become a modern country with few visible signs of squalor. All over the capital, commerce is brisk, from the upscale shopping malls in the north to the clogged passageways of the Grand Bazaar and the modest curbside shops of low-income quarters.

Even so, many Iranians are enraged by the state of their economy. Not only do they complain about high unemployment and income inequality; they are angered by the pervasive cronyism and political corruption that reward the ideological faithful. Three decades of populism have won the Islamic Republic the fealty of the rural underclass, but at the cost of rendering the educated middle class ineffective, unmoored, and nearly irrelevant to the country's economy.

A retired police commander told me that officers who, like him, had been trained in police academies under the Shah had been displaced and passed over for promotions in favor of ideologues who showed more zeal for enforcing moral strictures and dress codes. One night, a young carpet dealer whom I had met in the Grand Bazaar—in theory, an ideological stronghold of the regime—traversed most of the sprawling, traffic-choked city to sit with me on a low retaining wall by the Tajrish River, a place where he felt he would not be overheard describing the repression and corruption of his workplace.

"There are people in the bazaar who also work with the government," he said. "They are carpet sellers, but they pay no tax—they can export for free. The other group, which does not agree with the government, has a lot of problems." After elections, he claimed, police came around to check *bazaaris*' identity documents for the stamp confirming that they'd voted. "If you did not vote, they decide you are in the group that disagrees, and they write down your address and everything. They can close your shop. What can we do?"

Sometimes, the carpet dealer said, people from the tax office went around the bazaar asking merchants about their contact with foreign tourists and businesspeople. "They look at information in our passport and they say, 'Why were you not in the war?' Then they want to know 'Why do these foreign people come to your shop?'" he said. "But we have to have something to eat! You can't sell carpets to Iranians, because they have no money."

One Friday morning, outside a mosque in the working-class neighborhood of Narmak, where Ahmadinejad grew up, I met a young man who rented a narrow basement apartment. He had been trained as an electrical engineer with a specialty in jet engines, but he worked in a tire factory and had not been paid in five months. "Because of the wrong policies of Ahmadinejad, our factory's door is locked," he told me. "I have two engineering certificates, but unfortunately there is no place for technocrats in this country." He had voted for Ahmadinejad in 2005, but he had come to believe that the President's economic policies were "a hundred per cent wrong." He echoed the credo of Tabibian: "Economic freedom will come together with political freedom."

Young people in the run-down neighborhood of Naziabad, in south Tehran, told me that they saw no point in going to school. The best they could hope for, if they wanted to make money, was a life of crime. A neighborhood drug dealer said that he'd started selling methamphetamine and hashish because it was a lot more lucrative than the textile business, which he'd worked in previously; with prices rising ever higher, he needed the income. Even in Naziabad, commercial space was selling for twice as much as it had a year earlier, in 2007. A neighborhood barber, Mojtaba, told me that he'd raised his prices a hundred and thirty per cent, just to keep pace with inflation.

Tabibian told me that such stories were typical: "We have very high unemployment among educated young people. That is one of the failures of the government. And real-estate speculation has a drastic effect on income distribution. People without property are in an extremely difficult situation."

At a cramped real-estate brokerage, whose neon sign cast a harsh light inside, a samovar steamed in one corner and two middle-aged real-estate agents sat behind green desks, with a map of Tehran tacked to the wall behind them. All over the city, the proprietor informed me, real-estate prices were twice as high as they had been a year ago. "Before Ahmadinejad, there was a steady market you could forecast," he said. "Since Ahmadinejad, the prices have gone up two or three times." The economy was flush with cash, and Iranians needed to find safe places to invest it; since domestic industries were imperilled by the flood of imports, the obvious alternative was real estate.

"They sell their place for a hundred thousand dollars and buy a new place for eighty thousand," the real-estate agent explained. "We have a bad economic situation at the moment—a sick economy with poor management. Thirty per cent of the people have family money. They sell their property, buy something cheaper, and spend the difference." And the other seventy per cent? The real-estate agent laughed. "We have a stadium over here," he said. "They go and hang themselves."

Last April, Ahmadinejad gave a speech in Qom addressing Iran's economic woes. Iranians should be grateful, he proclaimed, for twenty-two-per-cent inflation. Foreign powers wanted Iran to suffer seventy-per-cent inflation, but his administration had fended off their schemes. Still, he could not deny the persistence of corruption and other economic problems. These problems, he said, were the fault of sinister elements within his own cabinet. His economic and finance minister, Davoud Danesh-Jafari, who had opposed Ahmadinejad's slashing of interest rates and expansion of the money supply, was compelled to resign.

Danesh-Jafari was not the only target. The first governor of the Central Bank under Ahmadinejad was forced out for opposing the lowering of interest rates. The second, Tahmaseb Mazaheri, grew increasingly vocal against the President's policies, telling foreign reporters in June that Iran was flirting with hyperinflation if it did not raise its interest rate. When Ahmadinejad still refused to listen, the Central Bank did an extraordinary thing: it simply withheld credit. For the first time since Ahmadinejad took office, inflation started to decline, falling from twenty-nine per cent in July to twenty-four per cent by October. Mazaheri was also forced out, but the credit freeze is likely to remain quietly in place until the next Presidential election, in June.

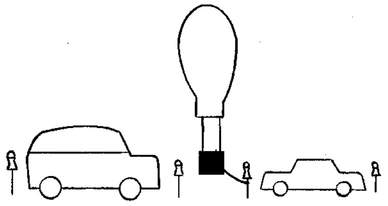
Under its most recent development plan, Iran has adopted a privatization program, but it is unlikely to unfold in a straightforward way. Iranian industries have been protected with state money for so long that no one knows what they are actually worth, and Iranian labor law makes it impossible for new owners to streamline bloated workforces. The most likely buyers of state-backed companies, analysts told me, are those favored by the government: Revolutionary Guards, Islamic foundations. Consequently, privatization will at first permit an armed and unaccountable oligarchy to amass still more wealth.

And yet, in the long run, the program may be transformative. Even if none of the state's oil or telecommunications companies, for instance, ever reach the private sector, the new law permits entrepreneurs to start new companies in those industries. Bijan Khajehpour, the consultant, is hopeful. "We have had a very long culture of private-sector activity in this country," Khajehpour told me. "It's not like those Communist states that collapsed and they didn't have any."

A dynamic private sector might seem like something the Iranian government would be eager to cultivate, in order to halt the deterioration of its economy. But, because the government has oil revenues, it doesn't depend on taxes, and so it doesn't depend on a productive class or a productive economy for its survival. Rather, the people depend on the government.

Sanctions multiply that effect, Tabibian told me. Because of the American embargo, which prohibits U.S. companies from extracting or refining Iranian oil, the capacity of Iran's oil industry has been limited. Without the embargo, he said, "Iran could supply a lot more oil and gas to the market." Meanwhile, Iranian middle-class experts could work for American firms, instead of emigrating or becoming employees of the state.

Iran's middle class is something of a paradox. "People are complaining all the time," Tabibian said. "They show you their pay stub and tell you their rent is twice as much. They don't tell you what they actually earn. They get paid more than their salary—there are bonuses, overtime, bonuses for Eid and other national festivals. Inflation is the result of spending, so there have to be people who spend money. They overspend. Expenditures run ahead of production. There are families in very bad condition, but look at the indicators—car ownership, having modern appliances."



Even if Iran's middle class is finding ways to live decently, it contributes little to the economy. Khajehpour's research has shown that many middle-class Iranians live on unsustainable and ultimately unproductive sources of income: remittances from relatives abroad, second jobs, brokering deals between third parties, selling off family property. It's a precarious existence for the class that would normally stand at the core of a healthy economy. And that is no accident.

Salehi-Isfahani explained, "An unproductive middle class can be tamed. You don't really need them, so you say, 'Go to hell—if you don't even come out of your houses, nothing happens.' But if they're all engineers, or exporting goods, and that's where the government money comes from, if you tell them to go to hell, exports drop and you're out of business." Now that oil has plunged to below forty-five dollars a barrel, Salehi-Isfahani says, the government will be forced to rely on the part of society that has the skills and the capital to produce goods. He added, "If the middle class is productive, there is a much stronger chance it will lead to democracy, I think."

To forestall this, it seems, the Iranian regime has repeatedly resorted to sweeping its economic experts out of government. But the ideas themselves are harder to dislodge. Even Ahmadinejad's government has begun, for lack of any better option, to embrace reform. In a bill that was recently submitted to parliament, the administration has proposed eliminating energy subsidies—a possible first step toward eliminating other subsidies as well.

Tabibian has watched this latest swing of the pendulum with a wry and cautious optimism. "I do not know what to make of all this," he wrote recently in an e-mail. "I guess this is a big change in their policy standing, given the populist position of the government. But will they be able to carry out such ideas? I only pray." ♦

speakeasy

valentine's day
love is strange

On February 14th, *The New Yorker* will début a new series of cabaret-style evenings, The New Yorker Speakeasy. Conversations and cocktails ... no password required.

Deborah Treisman

The New Yorker's fiction editor and host

Gabriel Byrne

read a love letter by Dylan Thomas.

Victor Ra

will read a short story

effrey Eugenides and
Karen Russell

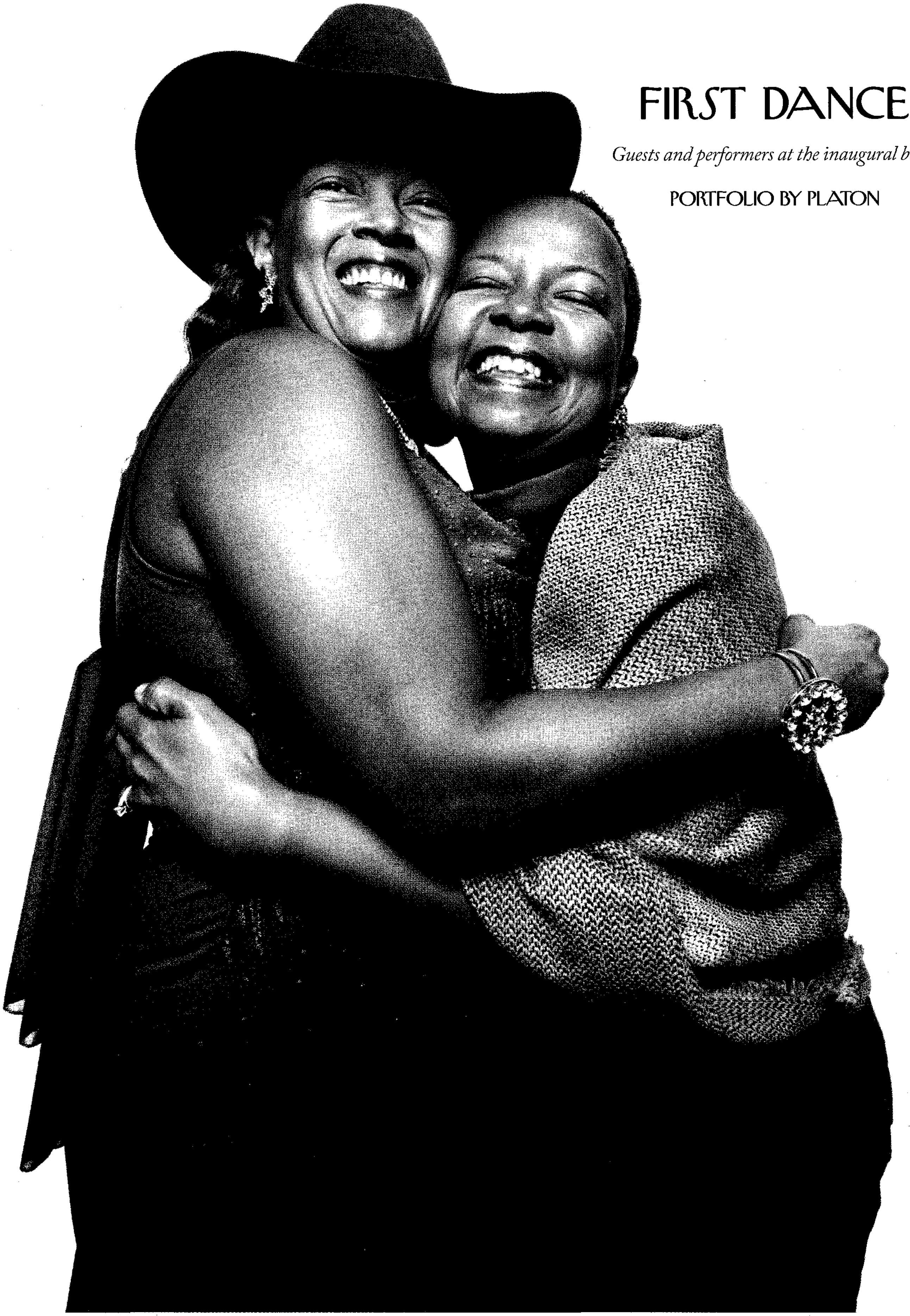
Grizzly

Molly Brown, age fourteen, a campaign volunteer from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, attended the Midwestern Ball.

FIRST DANCE

Guests and performers at the inaugural balls.

PORTFOLIO BY PLATON



Dr. Reba Williams-White, from Terrell, Texas, and her sister Ima Wideman, a registered nurse from Forney, Texas.

The Reverend Jesse Jackson and his daughter Santita Jackson, a radio-show host, from Chicago, were at the Obama Home States Ball.

Childhood friends Margo Bouchet, an attorney from Los Angeles, and Lydia Padilla, an attorney from New York City.

David Axelrod, senior adviser to the President, from Chicago, attended the Obama Home States Ball.

Guillermo Moreno, age fifteen, a campaign volunteer from Wildwood, Missouri, was at the Midwestern Ball.

Marc Anthony and Jennifer Lopez sang a duet in Spanish at the Western Ball.

Stevie Wonder performed "Signed, Sealed, Delivered," among other songs, at the Neighborhood Ball.

Jeremy Leffler, an analyst from Indianapolis, and Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Alejandro Alemán, from Washington, D.C.

Terese Palomino, age three, and Preston Palomino, age six, from Seattle. Their father was at Princeton with Michelle Obama.

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

MS. KENNEDY REGRETS

She's unable to be in the Senate today.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

Last Tuesday, Caroline Kennedy attended the Presidential Inauguration. The sun was shining on the Capitol, the sky was blue, the Marine Band was playing. Barack Obama, for whom she had campaigned ardently for nearly a year, believing him to be a leader who would inspire the country to greatness in the way that her father did, was about to become President. If ever there was a day to bolster a person's resolve to become a senator, this was it. And indeed Caroline Kennedy appeared stirred and happy and as determined as ever to become a part of the moment.

Then, on Wednesday, something happened to change her mind. That evening, she called Governor David Paterson—whose prerogative it was to appoint Hillary Clinton's successor to the Senate—to withdraw her name from consideration. What the something was, almost nobody knew. It was clearly not so serious as to be decisive, because she appeared to waver—people from the Kennedy circle at first denied that she was out of the running, and apparently people in Paterson's camp tried to persuade her to put herself back in again. But by midnight on Wednesday her decision was final: she was out.

The announcement took everybody by surprise. Even her closest friends had had no idea on Tuesday that it was coming. What could have happened? Nobody believed it was about Ted Kennedy's collapse, as the *Times* initially reported. That didn't make any sense—he'd been seriously ill for months. And his staff was said to be angry that his illness was being blamed. It was reported, on Thursday afternoon, that she had a household-employee problem and a tax problem, but even this, true or not, didn't answer all the questions: given that Paterson (according to some, contradicted by others, in a blizzard of claims and counterclaims) had apparently urged her to reconsider her decision, he evidently didn't regard the problem as disqualifying. By Friday morning, the situation had degenerated into open warfare, with some in Paterson's camp claiming that he hadn't meant to pick her anyway, and some in Kennedy's camp claiming that he had meant to pick her, that there was no nanny problem, and that the Governor was destroying an American icon out of pique. "This is a governor who lost his chief of staff a couple of months ago to the weirdest tax scandal imaginable, whose first day required him and his wife to discuss the affairs that they had during their marriage and whether or not government money was used for the hotel rooms, and he has people pushing vile comments about Caroline Kennedy?" Lawrence O'Donnell, a friend of hers and a political analyst for MSNBC, says. "And when they get into that phrase 'not ready for prime time'? This is the 'not ready for prime time' governor you're watching."

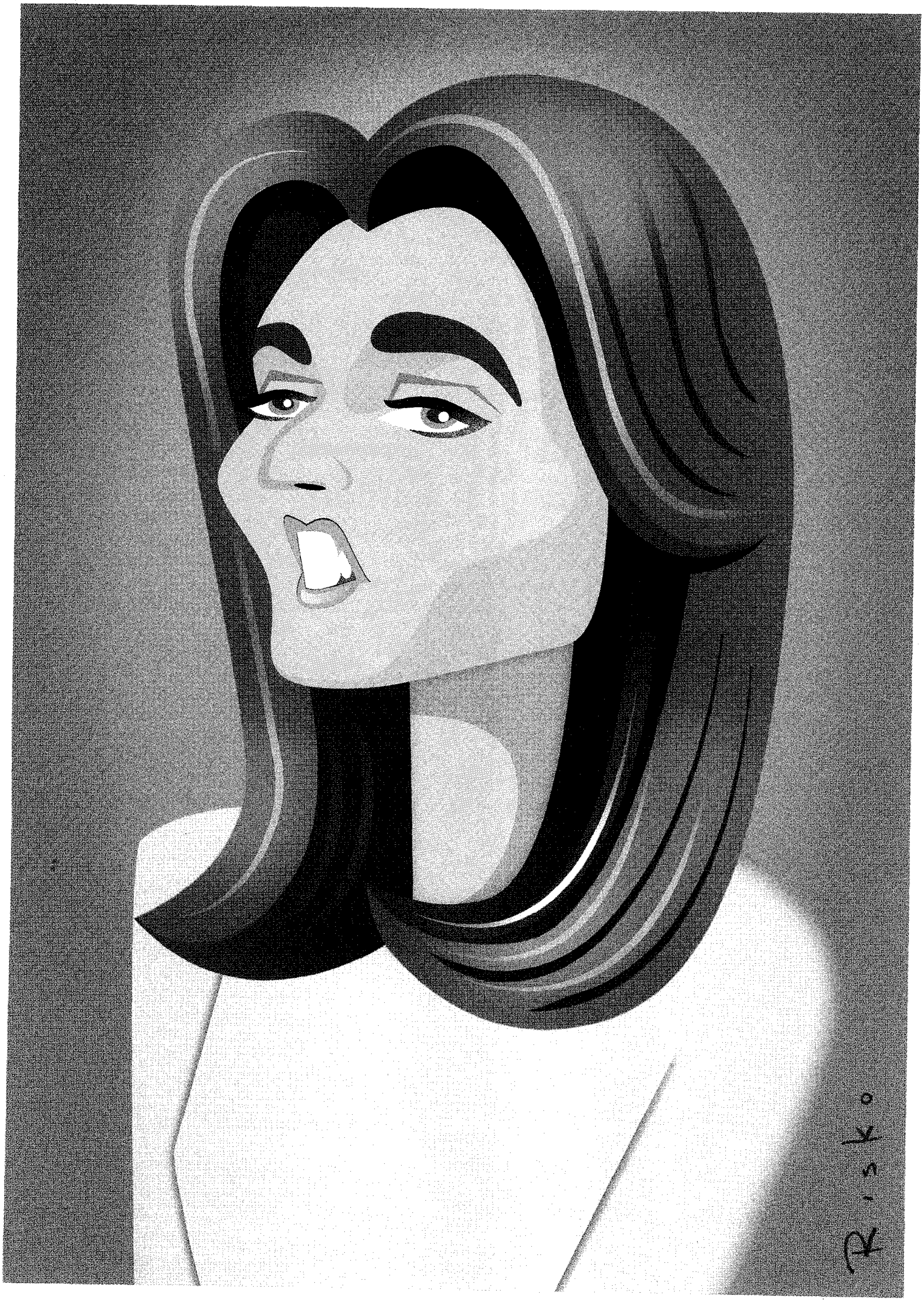
As for Caroline Kennedy's last-minute withdrawal, her friends were left to speculate. Had she suddenly panicked? Had she realized that she'd be signing on for more and more misery, of which the past few weeks had been just a foretaste? That her days would consist of drudgery—fund-raising phone calls, trudging up to frozen, decrepit towns she'd never heard of? That there would be no more leisurely summers in the Hamptons, no more spontaneous long lunches with friends, no more undisclosed finances? Had she realized, in short, that she wanted her old life back?

A couple of weeks before Christmas, just before she declared her interest in the Senate, she went to the birthday party of a friend she'd known since high school. Several other of her oldest, most trusted friends were there. All of them thought she'd be a great senator; they were very supportive of her making a bid. But when they asked her about her decision to run she looked scared and panicky and couldn't talk about it. She folded her arms over her chest, a guest recalled, and disappeared into herself—a characteristic gesture. Even before things started to go sour, in other words, she was apprehensive about what lay ahead. Then, a week or two later, after the tabloids and the upstate papers had at her, she attended another friend's birthday party and looked as though she'd just disembarked from a very steep and terrifying roller coaster: shaken, startled, roughed up.

Her coming out had gone worse than even her detractors could have hoped. She gave a few interviews to the press and became famous for saying "you know" two hundred times in thirty minutes. An aide to Mayor Bloomberg tried to secure endorsements for her by telling people that she was going to be the next senator, so they'd better get on board early, but his aggressiveness backfired and turned people against her. Local politicians made snippy comments. Representative Gary Ackerman, of New York's Fifth District, in Queens and Long Island, compared her to J. Lo. "One of the things that we have to observe is that DNA in this business can take you just so far," Ackerman said, on "Face the Nation." "You know, Rembrandt was a great artist. His brother Murray, on the other hand—Murray Rembrandt wouldn't paint a house."

In late December, New York voters preferred her for the Senate seat to Andrew Cuomo by thirty-three per cent to twenty-nine, but by early January, according to one poll, they preferred Cuomo by fifty-eight per cent to twenty-seven. Governor Paterson had clearly become irritated with the situation. "The notion that I have to take Caroline is not coming from me," he told the Buffalo *News*. "Why do you all pay so much attention to her? She's just another person. So what?" A Democratic Party consultant told the *News*, "He's not responding well to outside pressure. He's telling people, it would seem, that it's his decision and he doesn't like

Had Caroline Kennedy suddenly panicked? "That's a tough thing for anyone, giving away the life you've had," a friend says.



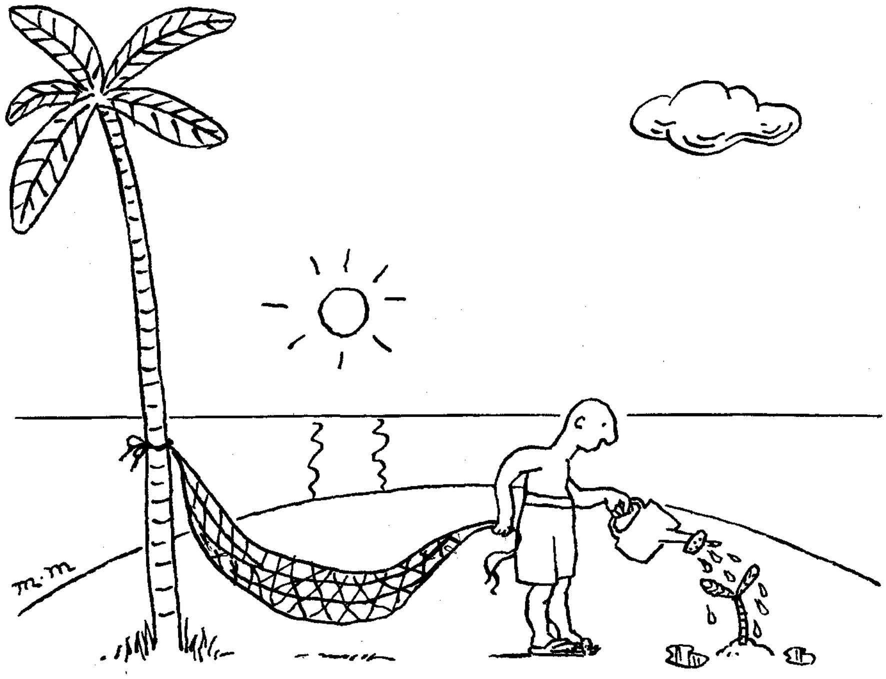
ROBERT RISKO

being pushed around." Even the favorable comments she received did not always redound to her benefit. "I somehow can't see her as being corrupt. It's not her legacy," Marie Owen, a sixty-nine-year-old flute player who lives on the Upper West Side, told the *Times*, when asked what she thought about the prospect of Caroline Kennedy's becoming a senator. "I kind of like the idea, maybe because I'm old."

Caroline Kennedy had many friends who had had ample experience with both the press and politicians, and many of them felt that the rollout had been handled stupidly. The public-relations firm she hired to advise her clearly didn't know what the hell they were doing, throwing her out there like that—they didn't understand her. "She's not glib, in the way that predictable politicians can be glib," Richard Plepler, a co-president at HBO and a friend, says. "She is thoughtful, articulate, fundamentally decent, and if you discussed any number of complicated issues with her currently part of the political dialogue she would be both informed and deeply thoughtful." When she met someone without a tape recorder running, she tended to make a good impression. "You always get a sense of entitlement or a sense of royalty, whether it's the Rockefellers or the Kennedys, and she never came off like that at all," Al Sharpton, who shared a photo-op lunch with her at Sylvia's, the restaurant in Harlem, soon after her announcement, says. "It was never like she felt like you were honored to meet her. She came off very studious, very sober, very serious. And I had that impression of her way before she ever thought about politics."

Why, the friends wondered, had she given those interviews without practicing first? The "you know"'s should have been drilled out of her. Yes, under ordinary circumstances she was perfectly articulate, and she'd given lots of interviews before, but this wasn't chatting with Charlie Rose on a book tour. This was a shark tank. Everyone was always so careful around her—were they too afraid to tell her she needed help? She likely would not have minded some interview preparation. Having been around politics all her life, she must have been vividly aware of how a misplaced word could destroy a career. "She was really worried about doing something to screw up Obama on the campaign," a friend says. "She's very self-conscious. She's always like, 'I don't know what I think, don't ask me.' " Or maybe the mistake was talking to the press at all. Maybe it would have been better if she'd released a short, gracious statement submitting her name to the Governor and listing a belief or two, and then retreated into humble silence. Not, please not, this comedy with the upstate campaign tour that wasn't an upstate campaign tour, with her leaping in and out of her car every ten minutes like she was delivering pizza.

The basic problem, the friends felt, was that reporters had failed to see the smart and decent person behind the stammering. In fact, they believed, it was precisely because she was smart and decent that she had found herself in this mess. "Most people have never had the experience of selling themselves publicly with TV cameras on," O'Donnell, who worked for Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan for many years, says. "Most of us have modesty impulses—you don't want to brag—and you have to learn to defy these basic human impulses and say, 'I am the greatest, and here is why you need me for this job,' and do it without any hesitation or any doubt. Which is inhuman." Her attempts at jokes somehow fell flat. When one of the *Times* reporters asked her at what point she decided to seek the Senate seat, she'd said, "Have you guys ever thought about writing for, like, a woman's magazine or something?" "That was an example of her wry sense of humor," a friend says. "She's always ready with a quip. It's disarming, it's meant to undermine the reverence that people sometimes attach to her."



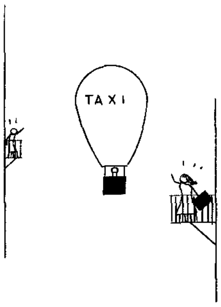
As the weeks went by, people who were not her friends questioned whether she had the fluency or the toughness to fight for the Senate seat, as she'd have to in 2010. Could she handle the hot dogs and the fried dough? Was she ready for Utica? This sort of questioning drove the friends insane. It was so *irrelevant*. After all, she didn't have to campaign in the same way that an unknown person has to. People already knew who she was, she already had their attention. They even already knew more or less what she stood for: she was a Kennedy—she'd been born with a platform. "This is the part that I have found most absurd in the press coverage: a childish level of analysis of what's involved in campaigning in New York State, how many hands do you have to shake in state fairs and what kind of smile do you have to have, as though it's something extraordinarily difficult to master," Lawrence O'Donnell says. "The politics of campaigning are so simple: I'm going to beat you and leave you dead in a snowbank in New Hampshire and never look back. But in the Senate you can be trying to prevail over another senator on Tuesday afternoon whose vote you know you're going to need on Wednesday afternoon for something else. The ordinary work of the Senate never involves fighting. Virtually all the people who run for Senate seats lie and say they're going to fight, but what they're actually going to do—which they may not know when they go to Washington for the first time—is beg. And beg people like me, whom they've never heard of, the staff director of this or that committee, before they ever get to meet the chairman. So the personal qualities necessary for Senate work are politeness and charm and graciousness and generosity, which New York tabloids have no comprehension of. Why should they? The press is never allowed in the rooms where governance actually takes place."

Caroline Kennedy's friends are always saying how normal she is, and it appears that they are right. Normal people do not run for the Senate. Normal people with lots of money and families that they like tend to want to enjoy the money and the families. They do not spend their winters on the phone grovelling for support, or their summers at obscure state fairs ingesting disagreeable and fattening local food. Caroline Kennedy is normal. Until recently, she wasn't even sure how much she wanted to work at all.

It was, evidently, Jacqueline Kennedy's intention to raise children who were as unaffected as possible by the extraordinary circumstances of their lives, and it seems that she succeeded: Caroline Kennedy's life has in many ways been indistinguishable from that of any other smart and reasonably diligent child raised on Fifth Avenue in the nineteen-sixties. She went to Sacred Heart School in New York in the lower grades, and then to Brearley. She was close to her brother; she resented her stepfather. In tenth grade, she went to boarding school at Concord Academy, where she smoked, like everybody else, and wore clogs, like everybody else. She put on weight and was hounded by her mother about it. (At her fiftieth-birthday party, according to one guest, many of the family toasts were about her obsession with being thin.) She had moments of greatness: according to the biographer C. David Heymann, when the police discovered pot plants that her cousin David was growing in her back yard in Hyannis Port, she took the blame.

After high school, she spent a year in London taking an art course at Sotheby's. She went to night clubs and had a love affair. She went to Radcliffe. She majored in fine arts. She did the usual college things. The summer after her freshman year, contacts of her mother's helped her obtain an internship at the *News*, and after college she went to work in the educational-film department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. While there, she met a designer of museum installations named Edwin Schlossberg, and married him when she was twenty-eight.

After a few years at the Met, she decided to go to law school at Columbia. She interned for a summer at her mother's lawyer's firm, but then decided she didn't want to practice. "I think that, like a lot of people who go to law school, she wasn't entirely sure what she wanted to do with her law degree," Ellen Alderman, a friend from law school, says. "We were taking it more as we went along." It seems as though Caroline did not, at the time, have a sense of what she wanted to do with her life or a measure of her own ambition. "I would say it was very much like her mom's," a friend says. "Her mom wanted to get smart things done, and she wanted to have some fun, and I think that's probably what Caroline thought. She thought, I'm going to stay in New York, on the Upper East Side, I'll marry this smart guy, that's good, I'll hang out with my three good friends from school, and we won't do anything crazy. I'm stabilizing things up here—John can move downtown. Jackie was like, Relax, let's have lunch, let's go for a swim, have you read this book?"

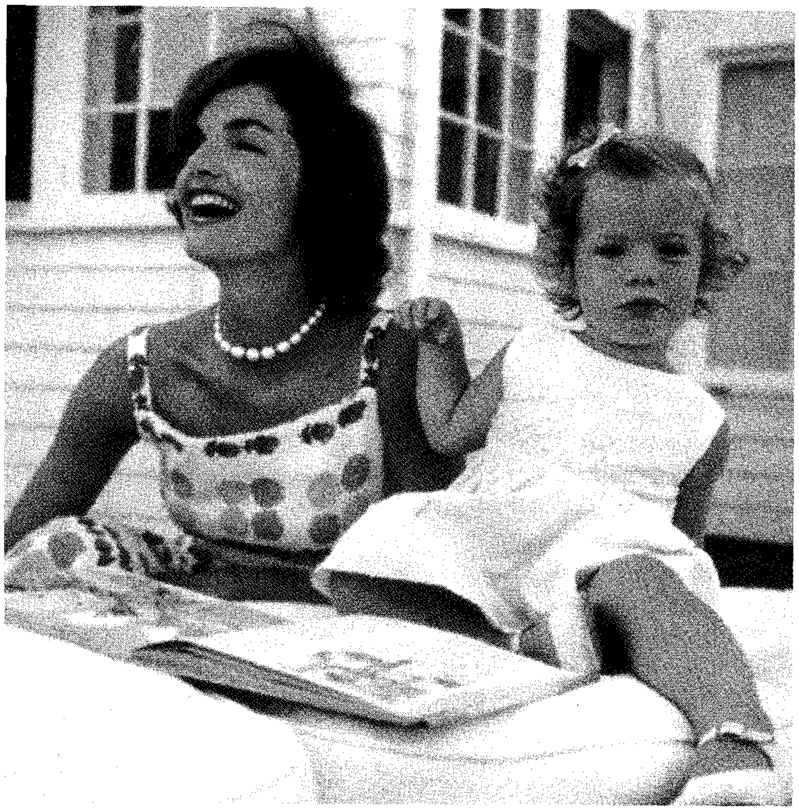


At law school, she and Ellen Alderman decided that, since the two-hundredth anniversary of the Bill of Rights was coming up, they would write a book together about it. They travelled around the country, interviewing people who had been involved in cases in which the principles of the Bill of Rights had been tested. The result, "In Our Defense: The Bill of Rights in Action," was more pedagogical than analytical: "A 1987 newspaper poll showed that 59 percent of Americans could not identify the Bill of Rights," the Authors' Note at the front of the book begins. "It seemed to us that an unfortunate gulf exists between those who know about the law and those who do not." The book sold very well, and a little while later Alderman and Kennedy decided to write a similar book, "The Right to Privacy," about privacy law.

Meanwhile, she was having children. She had her first baby right after she graduated from law school, and by the time "The Right to Privacy" was published, when she was thirty-seven, she had three children—Rose, Tatiana, and John—and she decided that, rather than write another book or take a job of some kind, she would concentrate on raising them. For the next six or seven years, she served on a few boards (the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation, the American Ballet Theatre, the Citizens Committee for New York City), but basically she was a stay-at-home mother. "I think she understood, as her mother did, that the first responsibility is motherhood and being a good spouse," Paul Kirk, the chairman of the board of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation, says.

In her early forties, she began publishing a series of anthologies. The first, "The Best-Loved Poems of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis," had a photograph on the cover of Caroline at age three or four, looking at a book with her mother, and on the back a painting of her mother reading to her brother and herself. The poems (Frost, Shakespeare) are interspersed with more family photos and short reflections by Kennedy on her parents. ("My mother was a true romantic. She lived her life on a dramatic scale and responded to the poetry of love with a passionate intensity.") "A Family of Poems: My Favorite Poetry for Children" also came with a cover photograph of her at three or four, this time sitting on a chair looking at a book, next to a Teddy bear sitting on a smaller chair. "A Patriot's Handbook" collected songs, poems, stories, and speeches celebrating America, with a photograph of her as an adult on the cover. "A Family Christmas," a selection of poetry, Christmas carols, and excerpts from fiction and nonfiction, had a photograph on the back of herself and her brother and mother, with their Christmas stockings hanging from the mantelpiece. She also edited "Profiles in Courage for Our Time," a collection of essays about the winners of the Profile in Courage Award, given by the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation to elected officials who have taken brave stands. The anthologies all sold extremely well—"The Best-Loved Poems of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis" sold close to half a million copies, and "A Family of Poems" stayed on the *Times* best-seller list for months.

It appears from Kennedy's commentar-



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: PHILLIP HARRINGTON/LOOK MAGAZINE COLLECTION; CORBIS; ROBIN PLATZER/TIME LIFE/GETTY

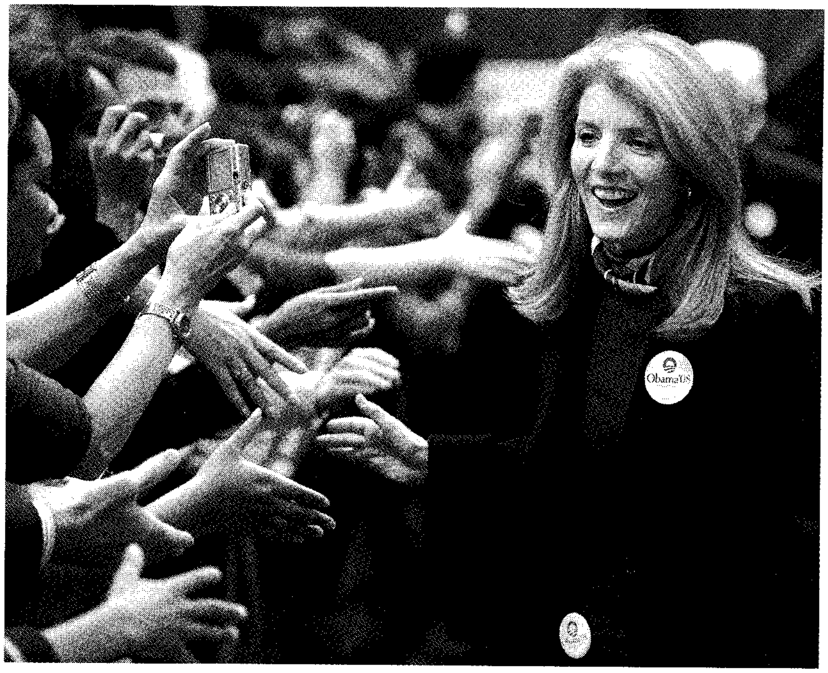
ies that the anthologies, like her legal books, have a didactic purpose, and are intended for people without prior knowledge of the subject. "Sometimes, poems like these can seem old-fashioned," she writes in the love-poetry section of her Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis book. "The language is complex, the flowery style at odds with modern life and the changing roles of men and women. But if you do make the effort, you will find that the emotions these poets express are not foreign or faraway but ones that all of us have felt for those we love." The same book includes, in an appendix, a selection of poetry by her mother. "Although I know my mother would have felt slightly embarrassed to have her own poems included with the ones in this book that she so admired, they have meant a lot to our family, and I wanted to share them," she writes. "She allowed them to be published during her life, and they reveal a bit about her in her own words. Though writing poetry can seem difficult, I hope these poems will also encourage readers to write poetry of their own."

During the weeks before Caroline Kennedy withdrew her bid, her friends said that her quest for the Senate seat followed naturally from her work in the New York City public schools. As her kids had neared college age, they said, she had started to think about what she was going to do with the rest of her life, and decided on public service. She cared about education, so she went to work for the schools; she cared about America, so she decided to run for the Senate. But her life and her decision, like most lives and decisions, were more haphazard than that.

In the summer of 2001, she ran into her old college friend Nicole Seligman at a party on Martha's Vineyard and went for a walk on the beach with Seligman's husband, Joel Klein, the chancellor of the New York City schools. They started talking about her life, and she started talking about public service and government. Not long afterward, Klein offered her a job. As the executive director of the Office for Strategic Partnerships, she was charged with raising money for the schools from private companies, and with changing public education's reputation in the city. Caroline Kennedy did some fund-raising herself, but mostly she visited a lot of schools and planned strategy. Many of the teachers at the schools were thrilled to have such a celebrated person come to visit. And, as always, people came to her because they wanted to help her and be associated with her. A public-relations man she knew persuaded AOL, one of his clients, to sponsor a Dave Matthews Band concert in Central Park and donate a million dollars to the schools. Inspired by the concert, Rosie O'Donnell gave another million. Some months later, Kennedy worked alongside the chairperson of Time, Inc., to organize a giant tag sale in Central Park, selling items that stores would donate.

She quit the job after two years, and although she continued to serve as the vice-chair of the board of the Fund for Public Schools, and spoke to her successor several times a week, for the most part she returned to being a stay-at-home mother. Then Obama appeared on the scene. She didn't pay much attention at first, but her children thought he was terrific, so she started to tune in to his speeches on television. She watched some of the debates. "She had a real yearning to serve in a more meaningful way than she had up to now," Gary Ginsberg, an executive vice-president at the News Corporation and a friend, says. "She started really watching the campaign in the fall of 2007, and I could sense then that she had started to think of it in more practical terms for herself."

It seemed that she knew she was not a natural politician—certainly not a rousing, ecstatic speechmaker. In January, 2008, she endorsed Obama in a speech at American University, and although she had given many endorsement speeches before, she was quite awkward, charmingly so. Dressed with almost overstated under-



From far left: Caroline Kennedy with her mother, Jacqueline, in 1959; with her father, the President, in the early nineteen-sixties; with her brother, John; with her Uncle Teddy, at her wedding, in Hyannis Port, in 1986; campaigning for Barack Obama last February, in Hartford.

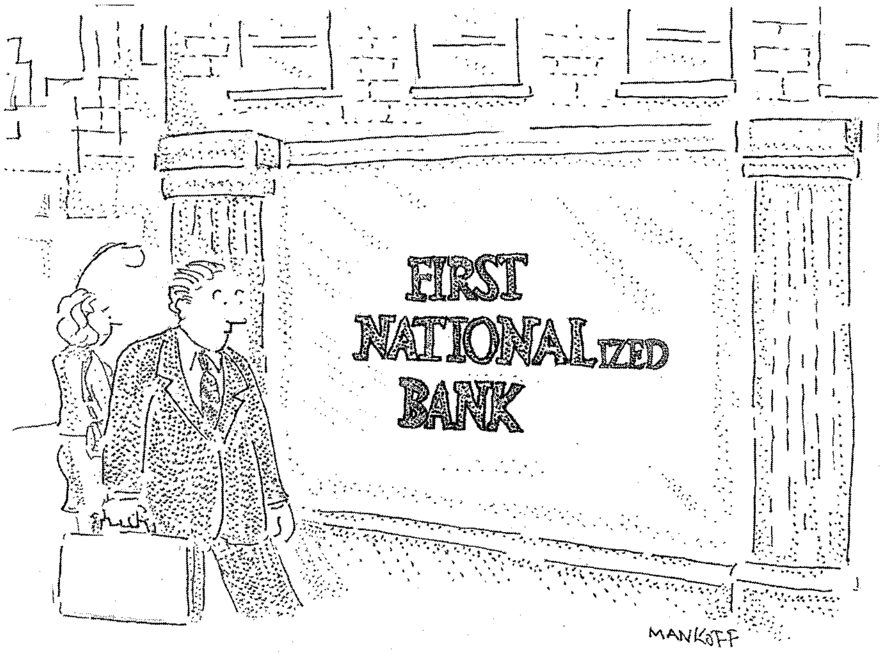
LEFT: HARRY BENSON; RIGHT: CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY

statement in a gray dress and a gray cardigan, she compared Obama to her father—"Fortunately, there is one candidate who offers that same sense of hope and inspiration"—with her mouth in a twisted half smile, as though anticipating the applause with a mixture of joy and embarrassment. When she stated that she was endorsing him, she did so as though she were saying, "Yes, I do realize you already knew what I was going to say." As she finished her endorsement, the crowd started chanting "Yes we can! Yes we can!" and she joined in, but in a low voice, and wagging her head from side to side as though she were making fun of it, except that she clearly wasn't—she was making fun of herself for being so self-conscious.

She started to stump for Obama around the country. "She campaigned in places like Orlando and Indiana and Ohio, getting her hands dirty, doing real retail politics, and I think she was surprised by how much she really enjoyed it," Gary Ginsberg says. "I think she just found the whole political process to be much more satisfying and engaging than she would have thought." Still, while she was campaigning for Obama, she was in control of her time. She wasn't required to show up anywhere or do anything in particular: any amount of time she gave to him was a gift for which the campaign was grateful. At one point last year, she was visiting the Obama campaign office in West Palm Beach and was interviewed for a local television station by a small boy about ten years old. They sat on a table, side by side, cases of bottled water stacked behind them against the wall. She was wearing a gray Obama "Hope" T-shirt and a string of pearls; he wore a jacket and tie. Each time he asked a question, he twisted around and aimed his very large microphone right at her mouth, as though carefully feeding a zoo animal. He asked her why she was supporting Barack Obama for President, what were her favorite subjects in school, whether she thought Joe Biden was long-winded (the boy had previously interviewed Biden, he explained, and had been told that that's what he was), and what "long-winded" meant. She had a faint smile on her face as she answered his questions, but she did not otherwise react to his cuteness with any cuteness of her own. Sometimes while he asked his questions, she gazed around the room, as though she were thinking about something else.

She enjoyed campaigning for Obama, but running for office on her own behalf was different. Drawing attention to herself, asking people to look at her, begging for favors—these were things she'd never had to do. Before the Senate opportunity came along, she'd never been inclined to political arguments, never been one to pontificate about an issue. "I thought she understood her place in the culture," one friend says. "If you asked her opinion on something, she would back off. She was comfortingly self-effacing." And what if she lost? What if she didn't get the job? That would be humiliating. Kennedys don't like losers, Caroline Kennedy especially. "In the case of the Profiles in Courage awards, she's made it clear in recent years that she doesn't always want us to recognize people who are political losers," John Shattuck, the C.E.O. of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation, says. "She wants the award to be given to people who succeed. That was reflected last year in two women she championed who are still in office. And that was quite an interesting philosophical discussion, because I think almost all the cases that her father described"—in the book that inspired the award, "Profiles in Courage"—"were cases of people who paid a huge political price for their actions. She felt that there was more than room for courage in politics among those who are successful."

Then, there were the legacy issues. She would never know whether people were voting for her or just for a Kennedy. But friends thought that, over the years, she'd grown more comfortable with being a



Kennedy, with all that it implied—comfortable enough to run for her Uncle Robert's old Senate seat. "For Caroline, maybe this is a thing that, ironically, she feels that she can own because it's so against her nature," a friend says. "For you to be able to take this kind of step and withstand it—even if you don't get the appointment, but that you jumped off that cliff—that's a real psychological accomplishment." Moreover, by endorsing Obama, at a time when it was not at all clear that he would win the primary, and from Hillary Clinton's home state, Caroline Kennedy had won the allegiance of a younger constituency on her own behalf. "This generation salutes her and Ted for what they did for Obama," Al Sharpton said in early January. "I'll give you an example. When she got out of the car in front of Sylvia's, people in the streets were screaming 'Caroline!' 'Caroline!' 'Senator!' I was amazed. Young people. And when we walked in, the people in the restaurant stood up and started clapping. And let me tell you why I thought that was interesting: they didn't react that way to *Obama* when I brought him there. When I brought Obama there, people were shaking his hand, but they weren't standing up and applauding. I was like, Wow, what is this? I talked to them, and people said, 'No, man, she risked a lot for us.' And, see, when you did something for people that nobody does something for, and you didn't have to do it, it hits an emotional thing with us."

And yet, of course, the best argument for appointing Caroline Kennedy to the seat had been that she *was* Caroline Kennedy. That was her chief value to New York. "There are very few people who walk into the Senate and know they'll be heard immediately," Richard Plepler said. "What have two-thirds of the Senate done before they got there? Served in the state legislature? You think that is a better qualification than her intellect, her breadth of experience, her ability to get things done for the state? I don't think so." "Let's say I'm David Paterson and I choose Maloney," Al Sharpton says, referring to Carolyn Maloney, the downstate congresswoman. "Well, why didn't you choose somebody that can get President Obama on the phone? He's gonna have hard questions either way. So it's almost like, what medicine do you wanna take?"

"She's the only person that New York can send to the Senate who is immediately valuable to other senators," Lawrence O'Donnell said. "Because there are really only three people in the Democratic Party who you can say is coming to your fund-raiser and sell tickets from that, and they are Barack and Michelle Obama and Caroline Kennedy. Hillary Clinton had that, too, and that enabled her to have a value to other senators right off the bat that she could then translate into what she could get for New York. . . . Harry Reid, in an unprecedented moment, has said that this is the senator he wants, and that is hugely important for practical purposes—he would have this star player who could be deployed to help get other senators elected. Andrew Cuomo is the only other person whom other people in the Senate have heard of, but, with all due respect, there isn't a senator in the country who would ask Andrew Cuomo to come to their fund-raiser in his first year in the Senate."

When Caroline Kennedy first announced her intention to seek the Senate seat, some of her friends were surprised that she would volunteer for such a role, given how shy and reserved she seemed, and how obsessed with maintaining her privacy. ("Jackie and Caroline had similar personalities," Andy Warhol told C. David Heymann. "They tended to bury their emotions. They were like icebergs. They revealed only a small portion of themselves—everything else was deeply submerged.") Unlike her brother, who didn't usually seem to mind when photographers took his picture or reporters approached him, Caroline Kennedy has always appeared to dislike the press. (She declined to be interviewed for this article.) Her friends understand that to speak about her in public would mean banishment. When she announced her bid for the Senate, she gave a few of her friends permission to speak with reporters, but several of those friends, after making the most anodyne or laudatory comments, panicked and withdrew them, or demanded anonymity. (This was no more than prudence: according to one biography, when a few of her brother's friends spoke fondly of him to reporters, in the wake of his death, they were told they were no longer welcome at his memorial service.)

She is often sarcastic when she talks to the press, and she can be short to the point of rudeness. She is easily annoyed by what she perceives to be prying or stupid questions. When Wolf Blitzer, of CNN, asked her why Hillary Clinton was not formally vetted by Obama's Vice-Presidential search committee, of which she was a member, Kennedy interrupted him.

"Boy, you know an awful lot about this, don't you?" she said. "'Cause I'm not telling you anything else, O.K.?"

"But just walk us through that decision," Blitzer asked.

"No, I'm not going to walk you through that decision!" she said indignantly.

"Why not?"

"It's a confidential process!"

Near the end of an interview after Kennedy's speech at the 2008 Democratic Convention, Katie Couric started talking about the Kennedy dynasty and what it has meant to America, laying it on a bit thick. Then she began, "Do you ever feel any pressure, I know you're very shy—" and Kennedy interrupted her (rather loudly, and not shyly at all): "Are you going to ask me if I'm going to run for office, by any chance? Is that where you're going with this question?"

"What do you think?" Couric asked.

Kennedy shook her head in irritated disbelief. "Well, you know, it's incredible, you're just so *creative*."

"Well, no, but I think people do," Couric said, trying again, a little taken aback. "Maybe if you have any renewed interest in going into political office, I mean, you already are in public service, but because of Teddy's illness and because of the era sort of coming to a close, I'm just wondering if you feel any kind of responsibility at all or if you feel completely comfortable with the path you've taken."

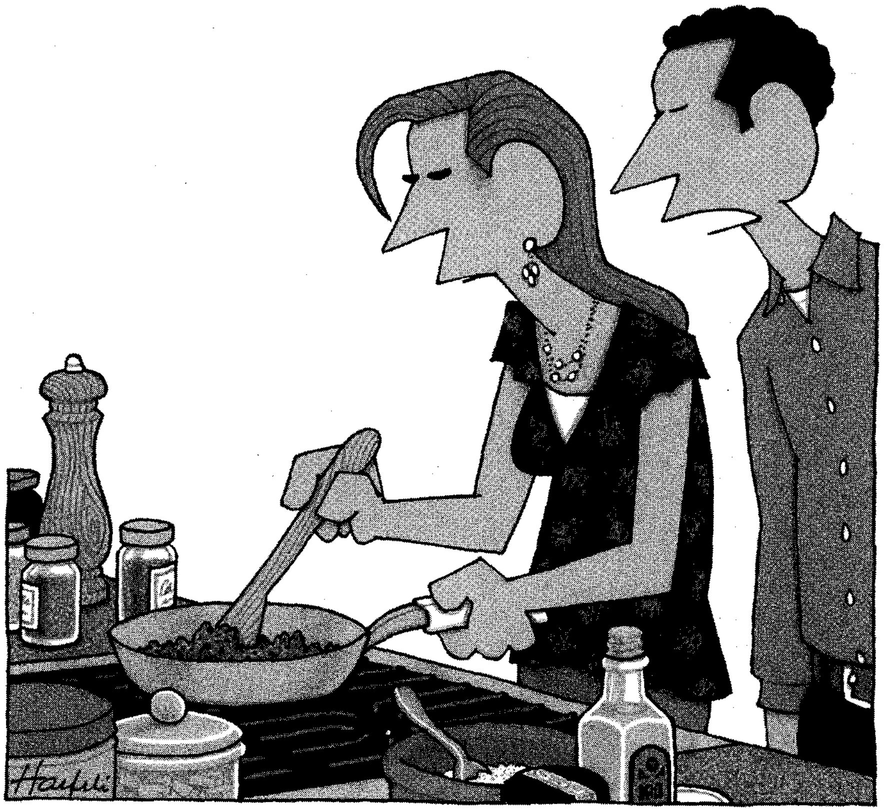
"Well, I don't make a lot of long-range plans."

But whereas her mother liked to keep her family out of the public eye altogether, insofar as that was possible, with Caroline Kennedy the issue seems to be not so much privacy as control. She is happy to reprint family photographs in her books and sell off intimate family artifacts, as long as she is in charge of the process. She organized two auctions of Kennedy memorabilia, in which she sold family letters, old toys, and bric-a-brac from the family homes. The two auctions brought in about forty million dollars. ("Only the Kennedys could hold a garage sale at Sotheby's," Alan Jellinek, a London art dealer, commented, about the second auction. "It was just a collection of old junk. . . . She sold everything but her mother's bloomers.") A few years ago, she permitted the licensing of her mother's jewelry collection to a company that sold cheap replicas of the pieces, the Jacqueline Kennedy Collection, on QVC.

Caroline Kennedy, it seems, is less private in the sense of secretive than private in the peculiar legal sense that the word has taken on, and that she has written about. For the Supreme Court, "privacy" implies control over one's body and its use (the right to marry a person of any race, to use contraception, to abort a first-term fetus); for Caroline Kennedy, control over her body and its use encompasses photographs taken, descriptions written, and habiliments abandoned. "Whether it be the disclosure of intimate details about a person's life or interference with private decisions," she wrote, with Alderman, in "The Right to Privacy," "there is a growing sense that all of us, well known and unknown, are losing control."

So Caroline Kennedy isn't private in the ordinary sense of the word. "I think there's a little bit of a misperception about that," Alderman says. "I agree that she was never in the public eye just to be there, she wasn't a 'Here I am' being in the public eye, but we went on two book tours together, and we were on television, and she was even, way back then, giving speeches to huge crowds and doing campaign work. I wouldn't describe her as shy. I think she's tasteful and dignified and didn't have a sense of self-promotion for the sake of it. But when there was something she was interested in she was out there." "Addressing a few Democratic Conventions, with twenty thousand people in the hall and twenty million on television—and yet having done that a few times in her life, people still talk about her as this shy, avoid-the-limelight person," Lawrence O'Donnell says.

Caroline Kennedy has a magic about her that is very useful in politics, and politicians in her family and her party have always used it. For most people old enough to remember her as a child in the White House, and to have been affected by her father's assassination, she provokes a mixture of benign emotions—nostalgia, respect, excitement, loyalty, pity, love. "One of the senior administrators in one of our schools broke down in tears to meet Caroline Kennedy," Joel Klein says. "She just couldn't get over it." Everywhere Caroline Kennedy goes, people come up to her and tell her how much some member of her family meant to them. They tell her what they were doing and how they felt when her father was killed. They tell her how elegant her mother was, or that they saw her mother walking in Central Park. They tell her they once sat next to her brother at a Knicks game. It never stops. She has been pursued by several stalkers. And it's not just strangers—it's friends as well. "No one is ever going to be the one to get off the phone with Caroline," a friend says. "No one's going to say 'I gotta go.' People just don't let her go. The circle around her—they think that if they maintain the friend-



"I was with you right up to the cumin."

ship with her that they're magic, too."

If Caroline Kennedy wants someone to help her with a project, if she wants advice, or an expert to explain something to her, virtually anyone will make himself available to her right away. A couple of weeks ago, she asked Sister Paulette LoMonaco, who works at Good Shepherd Services, and whom she knew from her time working in education, to organize expert briefings for her on child welfare and youth services. "I called these people on Sunday night of the long weekend or Monday morning, and everybody cleared their calendars for Tuesday," Sister Paulette says. "We're talking about folks who are booked almost every evening. And the e-mails of appreciation were just amazing. Let me read you one: 'Thank you so much for including me in the meeting, it was an incredible honor to be there, she made us all feel so comfortable, she is very much at ease with herself and this was so evident. I was also really impressed with her intelligence and with her ability to absorb so much information so fast.'" When she announced her candidacy for the Senate, a few New York politicians made headlines by resisting her, but many others supported her, even before they'd met. "A few weekends ago, the New York *Observer* called me and asked me about her, and I said I'd never met her but we all feel like we know her because we've watched her grow up, and so the response to her was really quite startling to me," Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, of New York's Twenty-eighth District, around Rochester, Buffalo, and Niagara Falls, who endorsed Kennedy, says. "I said a couple of nice things about her, and she was gracious enough to call me."

While she was in the White House—when she was three, four years old—the public was obsessed with her to the point of madness. Strangers sent her letters. Someone came out with a Caroline Kennedy doll. Press interest in her was insatiable—and while her mother hated the idea of her being in the newspapers, her father tended to encourage it, because it helped him. He would feed cute anecdotes about her to his press secretary. She rode her pony, Macaroni, into the Oval Office; she popped out from behind her father's desk to offer a perky greeting to Harry Truman ("You lived here before us, didn't you?").

Even long after she left the White House, she was badgered by the press. Ron Galella would wait outside her school to shoot pictures of her. "We grew up with her in *Life* magazine, and it was like she was our friend," a friend says. "She was heavy, she was unkempt, she had frizzy hair—for someone my age, everything I was going through she was going through. We read about her birthday parties, we read about her in high school, we read about her wedding." In recent years, she has lived a much more private life, but in one sense in the past decade she has been more than ever the focus of Kennedy reverence: when her brother was alive, when her mother was alive, they created some shade for her, and when they died some of that shade was removed.

It's hardly surprising that, having seen the world stutter and bumble in her presence all her life, she often finds it ridiculous. How could she not? Her mother was known for her witty derision—she referred to Lyndon Johnson and his wife as "Colonel Cornpone and his little pork chop"—and Caroline Kennedy is also funny. She is wry; she can be scornful. She still has a bit of boarding-school blasé about her—the heavy-lidded eyes, the ironic smile, the husky voice. "Caroline tended to see the foibles in people, whereas John looked for more positive traits," George Plimpton once said. "Caroline could cut people down with a few trenchant words; John built

ARMY CATS

1.
Over by the cemetery next to the CP
you could see them in wild catmint going crazy:
I watched them roll and wriggle, paw it, lick it,
chew it, leap about, pink tongues stuck out, drooling.

Cats in the tanks' squat shadows lounging.
Or sleeping curled up under gun turrets.
Hundreds of them sniffing or licking
long hind legs stuck in the air,

great six-toed brutes fixing you with a feral,
slit-eyed stare . . . everywhere ears twitching,
twitching as the armor plate expanding
in the heat gave off piercing little pings.

Cat invasion of the mind. Cat tribes
running wild. And one big pregnant
female comes racing through weeds to pounce
between the paws of a marble dog

crouching on a grave and sharpens
her claws against his beard of moss
before she goes all silky, luxuriously
squirming right under the dog's jaws,

and rolls over to expose her swollen belly.
Picture her with gold hoop earrings
and punked-out nose ring like the cat goddess Bast,
bronze kittens at her feet, the crowd drinking wildly,

women lifting up their skirts as she floats down
the Nile, a sistrum jangling in her paw.
Then come back out of it and sniff
her ointments, Lady of Flame, Eye of Ra.

2.
Through the yard the tanks come gunning,
charioteers laughing, goggles smeared with dust
and sun, scattering the toms slinking
along the blast wall holding back the waves

from washing away white crosses on the graves,
the motors roaring through the afternoon
like a cat fuck yowling on and on.
The gun turrets revolving in the cats' eyes

swivel and shine, steel treads clanking,
sending the cats flying in an exodus
through brown brittle grass, the stalks
barely rippling as they pass.

3.
After the last car bomb killed three soldiers
the Army Web site labelled them "martyrs."
Four civilians killed at checkpoints. Three on the airport road.
A young woman blown up by a grenade.

Facts and more facts . . . until the dead ones
climb up out of the graves, gashes on faces
or faces blown away like sandblasted stone
that in the boarded-up museums'

fractured English "leaves the onlooker
riddled and shaken, nothing but a pathetic gaping . . ."
And then I remember the ancient archers
frozen between reverence and necessity—

who stare down the enemy, barbarians,
as it's told, who nailed sacred cats to their shields,
knowing their foes outraged in their piety
would throw down their bows and wail like kittens.

—*Tom Sleigh*

them up. She had a dark sense of humor, a rapier wit; his was effervescent. She trusted nobody, he trusted everyone."

Over the years, she has achieved a certain amount of distance from the phenomenon of Caroline Kennedy—she doesn't take herself so seriously that she is above using Kennedy worship to her advantage. At her fiftieth-birthday party, George Bell, the husband of her boarding-school roommate, Carrie Minot, read aloud as a toast the flattering e-mails she had sent to a Harvard professor (and then gleefully forwarded to Bell) asking him to rearrange his schedule so she could accompany him on a trip. (He did.)

There's a brief scene in which she appears in "Taking On the Kennedys," a documentary about Kevin Vigilante's race against Patrick Kennedy, son of Teddy Kennedy, when Patrick first ran for Congress, in 1994. She has just flown in on a private plane to stump for him. The press gathers at the airport to meet her, and a television reporter from a local station, WLNE, jostles to the front of the pack and holds his microphone out. He beams at her, and she, in a fuchsia suit and immobile 1994 hair, smiles brilliantly back at him. "How does it feel still being in the public eye, I mean, the name Kennedy, *Caroline Kennedy*," he babbles, with a giddy little shrug of his shoulders, as though he can't quite believe he is standing there talking to her. "How does it make you feel?" She looks at him, still smiling. "How does it make me feel being Caroline Kennedy?" she asks, and laughs at him, her mockery spiced with a tiny hint of flirtation. He tries to rescue his question by rephrasing, but appears to realize that he has had his moment and flubbed it.

Now Caroline Kennedy has had her moment and flubbed it. Paterson has appointed Kirsten Gillibrand, a second-term congresswoman from Hudson, near Albany. "Paterson has no comprehension of upstate New York, absolutely none, and has chosen someone better at representing cows than people," Lawrence O'Donnell says. "What you have is the daughter of a lobbyist, instead of the daughter of a former President or the son of a former governor. This is the hack world producing the hack result that the hacks are happy with."

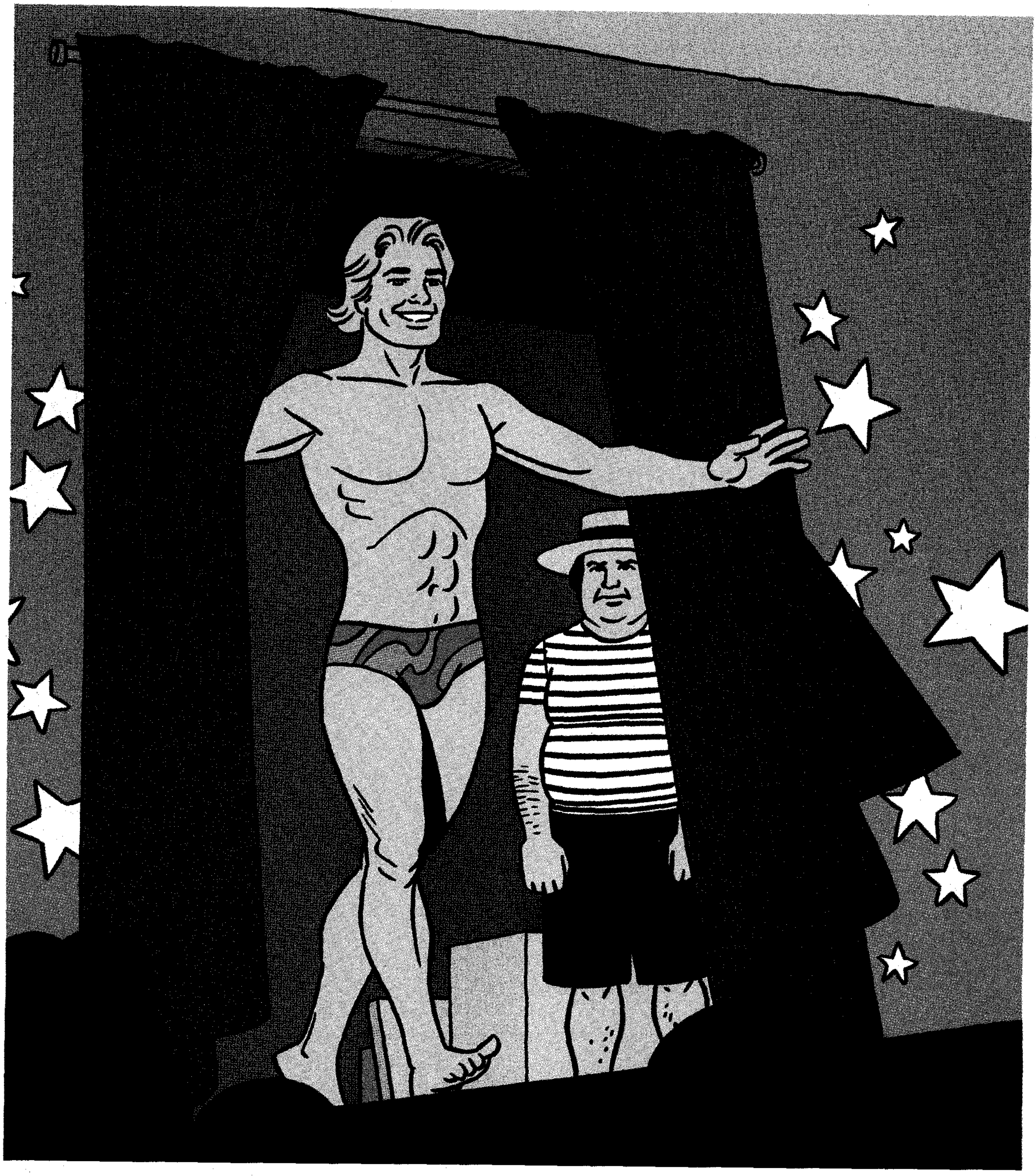
To Caroline Kennedy's friends, her putting herself forward for the Senate, whatever the result, was a step of great courage and significance. "This is a person who has the blessing of using her remarkable position to advance larger issues," Richard Plepler says, "and, because she has never taken advantage of that, that is something that speaks to the integrity and, not to be too corny, but, the nobility of what she's doing now." "To put yourself through that seems like a lot for her, but I take my hat off to her, because changing your life up and trying things at—you know, she's not twenty-five—takes a certain amount of guts," a friend says. "She's not stupid, she knew that the life she knew would come to an end whether she got the appointment or not, and that's a tough thing for anyone, giving away the life you've had."

But in the end, it seems, she could not give away the life she had. Despite all the work that her friends and supporters put into her bid, despite all the behind-the-scenes campaigning, despite all the fuss and the coverage and the lunches and the phone calls and the public-relations consultants, she decided that she would prefer not to. Her friends could support her and spin for her and be excited for her, but they couldn't make her *want* it. There would be three more days of bad press, and then everyone would forget about it and leave her alone. She would go back to being Caroline Kennedy, and that would be fine. ♦

FICTION

AL ROOSTEN

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS



Al Roosten stood nervously behind the paper screen. Was he nervous? Well, he was a little nervous. Although probably a lot less nervous than most people would be. Most people would probably be pissing themselves by now. Was he pissing himself? Not yet. Although, wow, he could understand how someone might actually—

"Let's fire it up!" shouted the m.c., a cheerleaderish blonde too old for braids, whose braids were flipping around as for some reason she pretended to jog. "Are we fighting drugs here today or what? Yes we are! Do us businesspeople approve of drugs for our kids? No way, we don't, we're very much against that! Do we use drugs ourselves? Kids, those of you who are here, believe me when I say we don't, and never did! Because, as someone who does feng-shui for a living, there's no way I could do my feng-shui if I was wacked out on crack, because my business is about discerning energy fields, and if you're cracked up, or on pot, or even if you've had too much coffee, the energy field gets all wonky, believe me, I know, I used to smoke!"

It was a lunchtime auction of Local Celebrities, a Local Celebrity being any sucker dopey enough to answer "Yes" when the Chamber of Commerce asked, "Willing to participate in community antidrug effort Celebrity Auction event tentatively entitled Boys of Summer?"

"So that's why we're here raising money for LaffKidsOffCrack and their antidrug clowns!" the blonde shouted. "Such as Mr. BugOut, who, in his classroom work, with a balloon, makes this thing that starts out as a crack pipe and ends up as a coffin, which I think is so true!"

Larry Donfrey of Larry Donfrey Realty stood near Roosten in just a swimsuit. Donfrey was a good guy. Good but flawed. Not that bright. Always tan. Yeow, what was his Boy of Summer? Surfer? Lifeguard? Partial Nudist? Was Donfrey attractive? Cute? Would the bidders consider Donfrey cuter than him, Al Roosten? Oh, how should he know? Did he like guys? Was he some kind of expert judge on the cuteness of guys? No, he didn't like guys and never had. There had been a period in junior high, yes, when he had been somewhat worried that he might perhaps like guys, and had constantly lost in wrestling, because, instead of concentrating on his holds he was always mentally assessing whether his thing was hurting inside his cup because he was popping a mild pre-bone or because the tip was sticking out an airhole, and once he was almost sure he'd popped a mild pre-bone when he found his face pressed against Tom Reed's hard abs, which smelled of coconut, but, after practice, obsessing about this in the woods, he realized that he sometimes popped a similar mild pre-bone when the cat sat on his groin in a beam of sun, which proved he didn't have sexual feelings for Tom, since he knew for sure he didn't have sexual feelings for the cat, since he'd never even heard that described as being possible. And from that day on, whenever he found himself wondering whether he liked guys he always remembered walking exultantly in the woods after the liberating realization that he was no more attracted to guys than to cats, just happily kicking the tops off mushrooms in a spirit of tremendous relief.

JAIME HERNANDEZ

A sort of music started up, consisting of a series of loud, thick bumps punctuated by a smattering of feminine groans and something that sounded like a squeaky door, and Larry Donfrey headed down the runway to sudden cheers and whoops.

What the heck? thought Roosten. Whoops? Cheers? Would he get cheers? Whoops? He doubted it. Who whooped/cheered for the round bald guy in the gondolier costume? If he were a woman, he'd cheer/whoop for Donfrey, the guy with the tight ass and ripped brown arms.

The blonde cued Roosten by pointing at him while pretending to walk in place.

Oh God oh God.

Roosten stepped warily out from behind the paper screen. No one whooped. He started down the runway. No cheering. The room made the sound a room makes when attempting not to laugh. He tried to smile sexily but his mouth was too dry. Probably his yellow teeth were showing and the place where his gums dipped down.

Frozen in the harsh spotlight, he looked so crazy and old and forlorn and yet residually arrogant that an intense discomfort settled on the room, a discomfort that, in a non-charity situation, might have led to shouted insults or thrown objects but in this case drew a kind of pity-whoop from near the salad bar.

Roosten brightened and sent a relieved half wave in the direction of the whoop, and the awkwardness of this gesture, the way it inadvertently revealed how terrified he was, endeared him to the crowd that seconds before had been ready to mock him, and someone else pity-whooped, and Roosten smiled a big loopy grin, which caused a wave of mercy-cheers.

Roosten was deaf to the charity in this. What a super level of whoops and cheers. Suddenly he remembered the special turn. Should he try it? Ho ho, he should, he would, and he did, increasing the level of whoops/cheers, which, to his ear, were already at least equal to Donfrey's. Plus Donfrey had been basically naked, which meant that technically he'd beaten Donfrey, since Donfrey had needed to get naked just to manage a tie with him, Al Roosten.

Ha-ha! Poor Donfrey! Running around in his skivvies, and to no avail.

The blonde threw a butterfly net over Roosten's head and he joined Donfrey in the cardboard jail.

Now that he had thrashed Donfrey, he felt a surge of affection for him. Good old Donfrey. He and Donfrey were the twin pillars of the local business community. He didn't know Donfrey well. Just admired him from afar. Just like Donfrey admired him from afar. Once, the whole Donfrey clan had filed into Roosten's shop, Bygone Daze. Donfrey's wife had been beautiful. Nice legs, slim back, long hair. You looked at her and couldn't look away. Donfrey's kids had also seemed great, two elflike androgynes politely debating something, possibly the history of the Supreme Court?

Each Celeb had his own barred window in the cardboard jail. Donfrey now stepped away from his and toward Roosten's. How gracious. What a prince. They'd have a chat. The crowd would jealously wonder what the twin pillars were chatting about in private. But, sorry, no: this was between pillars, rabble need not apply.

Donfrey was saying something, but the music was blaring and Roosten was partly deaf.

Roosten leaned in.

"I said, Don't worry about it, Ed," Donfrey was shouting. "You did fine. Really. No biggie. Give it a week, nobody will even remember it."

What? What the hell? By saying he'd done fine, was Donfrey implying that he hadn't? That he'd done badly? Humiliated himself? Was Donfrey on some other planet? On drugs? On drugs at an anti-drug event?

Had Donfrey called him Ed?

Donfrey could kiss his ass. That fake. That snob. He'd forgotten that. He'd forgotten that Donfrey was a snobby fake. That time the Donfreys came into Bygone Daze, they'd immediately turned and walked out again, as if they'd found Roosten's vintage collectibles too dusty and ill-selected for the Donfrey house, a literal mansion on a hill. Donfrey's wife wasn't beautiful, Roosten suddenly honestly admitted; she was an overgroomed scarecrow. As far as Donfrey's kids—if those kids belonged to him? He'd scruff them up a bit. Try and de-elfify them. Were they girls or boys? You honestly couldn't tell.

He didn't have kids himself. Had never married. He had the boys, however. The boys were his nephews. The boys were not elfin. Au contraire. The boys were great. The boys were all-boy. And how. Possibly too much so. Why his sister Mag insisted on taking them to Budgi-Cutz when Budgi-Cutz made them look like three hulking versions of the same odd Germanic roundhead, their bangs cut straight across, he did not know. Every night was a three-way grunting/wrestling fest in the basement, the boys calling one another Skuzzknuckles or FartIngestron until one of them bonked his round head into something metal and they all helped the hurt one upstairs, tears running down their wrestling-engorged cheeks, like three suddenly repentant Nazis—

Not Nazis. Jeez. Germans. Energetic Germanic lads, healthy young Beethovens. Although as far as Beethoven, he doubted Beethoven had ever pried a prayer-book rack off the pew with his bare hands on a dare from another Beethoven, while a third Beethoven proudly displayed, on a hymnal, four tightly rolled snot towers he'd just—

It was the divorce. It was Mag's divorce that had made the boys wild. It was sad about Mag. In high school, Al had been the popular wrestler and Mag had been the thin girl in ChristLife with a big crush on Christ. They'd lived on their parents' farm, but somehow only Mag had turned out farmish. Junior year, she'd started dating Ken Glenn, equally agrarian, with plate-size ears. There'd been jokes at the time about Mag and Ken being married in overalls. There'd been jokes about Mag and Ken being married in a church full of barnyard animals. If there was ever a marriage you'd expect to last, this one was it: two homely Christian farmers. But no, Ken had left Mag for another farmer's—

Mag was not homely. She was simple, she had a kind of simple earthy—

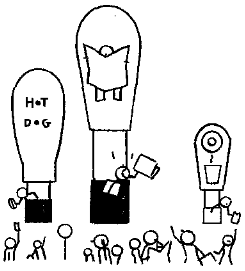
She was handsome. A handsome woman. She—everything was where it should be. She carried herself well. Except when bellowing at the boys. Then her face became a red contorted mask. You saw her frustration at being the only divorced woman in her extremely strict church, her embarrassment at having had to move in with her brother, her worry that, if he lost the shop (as it now appeared almost certain he would), she'd have to quit school and get a third job. Last night, he'd found her at the kitchen table after her shift at Costco, fast asleep across her community-college nursing text. A nurse at forty-five. That was a laugh. He found that laughable. Although he didn't find it laughable. He found it admirable. A snob like Donfrey might find it laughable. A snob like Donfrey would take one look at Mag in her baggy nurse's outfit and hustle his spoiled elves back to the stupendous Donfrey mansion, which had recently been featured in the Lifestyles section of the—

Oh, mansion shmansion. Did Gandhi's house have the largest outdoor trampoline in the tri-state area? Did Jesus have a two-acre remote-controlled car track, with mountains to scale and a little village that lit up at night?

Not in his Bible.

Huh. The cardboard jail was now filled with Celebs. How had that happened? He'd apparently missed the runway walks of Max of Max's Auto, Ed Berden of Steak-n-Roll, and the freakishly tall twin hippie brothers who ran CoffeeMinded.

The blonde was standing silently now, head down, as if waiting for her experience-based profundity to overflow into the showstopping heartfelt speech that would establish her once and for all as the most pain-racked person in the place.



"Folks, we've arrived at our most important aspect," she said softly. "Which is our auction, which is silent. Without you, LaffKidsOffCrack is just some guys with strong antidrug feelings, wearing weird clothes in their own homes. Write down your bid, someone will come around. Later, if you are the one who won, you'll be taken to lunch by your Celebrity who you bid for."

Was it over?

It appeared to be over.

Could he sneak out?

He could if he bent low.

He bent low and booked it as the blonde droned on.

In the changing area, he found Donfrey's clothes slopped over a chair: expensive pleated pants, nice silk shirt. On the floor were Donfrey's keys and wallet.

Just like Donfrey to junk up a perfectly nice changing area.

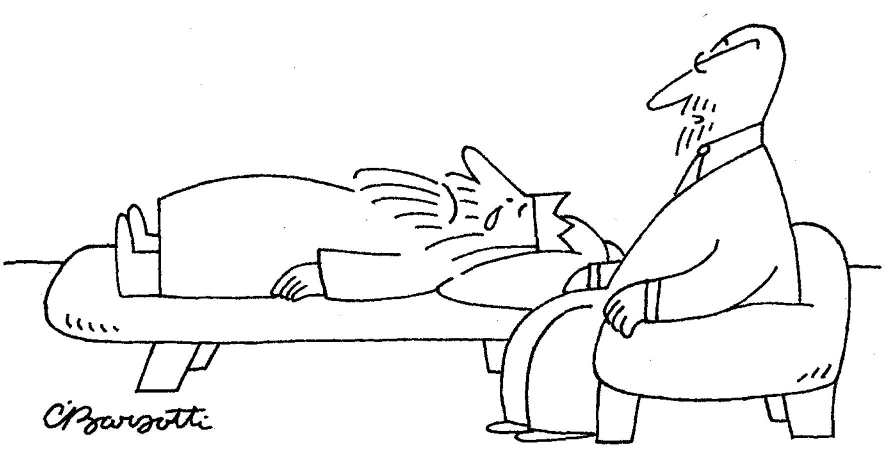
Oh, why be mad at Donfrey? Donfrey hadn't done anything to him. He'd just made a comment, trying to be nice. Trying to be charitable. To someone beneath him.

Roosten took a step forward and gave the wallet a kick. Wow, did it ever slide, right under a stack of risers. Like a hockey puck. There were the keys, alone now, underscoring the absence of the wallet. Yikes. He could say he'd accidentally kicked the wallet under there. Which was sort of true. He hadn't thought about it, really. He'd just felt like kicking it and then he had. He was impulsive like that. That was one of the good things about him. It was how he'd bought the shop. Failing shop. He gave the keys a kick. What the hell? Why had he done that? They slid even better than the wallet. Now wallet and keys were far under the risers.

Gosh, too bad. Too bad he'd accidentally kicked those things under there.

Donfrey burst into the changing area, talking loudly on his cell in a know-it-all voice.

She was fine, Donfrey was bellowing. Nervous but psyched. Being brave. Stiff upper lip. Kid was solid gold. Always did her share: carried the laundry down on her day, dragged the trash to the street. Hadn't slept all week. Too excited. What she was looking forward to most? Finally running with her class in gym. Imagine: all your life you're limping around with a bent-in foot, then they finally figure out a way to fix it. It was scary, yes, Jesus, the brace literally broke and reformed the foot. Poor thing had been waiting so long. They had to haul ass pronto, pick her up, shoot over to the place. They were running late, the auction thing had gone on and on. He probably should've skipped it but it was such a terrific cause.



"Well, if you're going to wiretap your people you are going to hear things."

Roosten finished dressing quickly and left the changing area.

Jeez, what was all that about? Apparently, one of the elves wasn't as perfect as she—

Well, that was sad. The sickness of a kid was—the children were the future. He'd do anything to help that kid. If one of the boys had a bent foot, he'd move heaven and earth to get it fixed. He'd rob a bank. And if the boy was a girl, even worse. Who'd ask a clubfoot or bentfoot or whatever to dance? There your daughter sat, with her crutch, all dressed up, not dancing.

Hundreds of dry leaf fragments were skittering across the FlapJackers parking lot. A bird on a parking bumper bolted, alarmed at the advance of the leaves. Stupid leaves, they'd never catch that bird. Unless he killed it with a stone, left it lying there. They'd be so grateful they'd declare him King of Leaves.

Ha-ha.

He gave a pile of leaves a vicious kick.

Shit. He felt like crying. Why, what was it, what was making him sad?

Off he drove through the town where he'd lived his whole life. The river was high. The grade school had a new bike rack. A ton of dogs leaped to the fence as usual as he passed the Flannery Kennel. Next to the kennel was Mike's Gyros. Once during seventh grade Mom had taken him to Mike's for a Coke.

"What seems to be the problem, Al?" Mom said.

"Everyone's calling me bossy and fat," he said. "Plus they say I'm sneaky."

"Well, Al," she said, "you are bossy, you are fat. And I'm guessing you can be pretty sneaky. But you know what else you are? You have what is called moral courage. When you know something is right, you do it, no matter what the cost."

Mom could sometimes be full of it. Once, she said she could tell by the way he ran upstairs that he'd make a great mountain climber. Once, when he managed a B-minus in math, she said he should be an astronomer.

Good old Mom. She'd always made him feel special.

Suddenly his face was hot. He felt Mom looking at him from Heaven, sternly but wryly, in that way she'd had, as if saying, Hello, are we maybe forgetting something?

Well, it had been an accident. He had just accidentally misplaced some things inadvertently. With his foot. Via spontaneously kicking them erroneously.

Mom's eyes narrowed in Heaven.

They were being mean to me, he said.

Mom in Heaven tapped her foot.

What was he supposed to do? Go racing back and tell them to move the risers? They'd know he'd done it. Plus Donfrey was probably long gone. Probably Donfrey's wife had a set of spare keys. Or someone else had driven them home.

But they weren't going home. They were going to the foot thing for their kid.

Shit.

Roosten pulled into a white-stoned driveway. He had to think. A Yorkie rushed up to the fence, barking ceremonially. Then a chicken came up. Huh. A chicken and a Yorkie, living in the same yard. They stood side by side, looking at Roosten.

Eureka.

He saw how he could do it.

He'd sneak back in, pretend he'd never left. Everyone would be searching for the wallet and keys. He'd look alongside them awhile. When they were about to give up, he'd say, I assume you've already looked under those risers?

Uh, well, no, Donfrey would say.

Might be worth a try, Roosten would say.

They'd get some guys and move the risers. And there would be the wallet and there would be the keys.

Wow, Donfrey would say.

Just a hunch, Roosten would say. I simply mentally eliminated all other possible options.

I'm afraid we've underestimated you, Donfrey's wife would say. We have to have you over to the house soon.

To the mansion, Donfrey would say.

And Al? Donfrey's wife would say. Sorry about that time we walked out of your shop. That was rude.

And Al? Donfrey would say. Sorry I called you Ed earlier.

No problem, Roosten would say. I didn't even really notice.

Dinner at the mansion would go well. Soon he'd basically be part of the family. He'd just drop by whenever. That would be nice. Nice to hang out in a mansion. Sometimes Mag and the boys might come along. Although the boys had better not break anything. They'd have to wrestle outside. One thing he did not need was his friends' mansion trashed. He saw Donfrey's wife, distressed by all the things the boys had broken, collapse into a chair and start weeping.

Thanks, boys, great, thanks a lot for that. Go outside. Go outside and sit quietly.

Now the moon is full in the big window and he and Donfrey are wearing tuxes and Donfrey's wife is wearing something low-cut and golden.

This dinner is great, he says. All your dinners have been great.

It's the least we could do, says Donfrey. You helped us out so much that time I stupidly lost my keys.

Ha-ha, yes, well, about that? Roosten says.

Then he tells them all about it: how he did an unfortunate thing, saw the light, raced back to help.

What a riot! says Donfrey.

That took guts, says Donfrey's wife. Coming back like that.

I'd say it took moral courage, says Donfrey.

Your honesty makes us admire you all the more, says Donfrey's wife.

Mag was there, too. What was she doing there? Well, it was fine, she could stay. Mag was a good egg. Decent conversationalist. The Donfreys would appreciate her good qualities, just like they appreciated his good qualities, and wouldn't Mom love seeing that, her kids finally getting their due from sophisticated people in a beautiful mansion.

An odd inadvertent sound of contentment jerked Roosten out of his reverie.

Ha-ha.

What the hell. Where was he?

The Yorkie was sniffing the chicken. The chicken didn't seem to mind. Or notice. The chicken had a laser-like focus on him, Al Roosten.

Yeah, right. Like that was happening. Like he was racing back. They'd see through him. They'd fry his ass. People were always seeing through him and frying his ass. When he'd stolen Kirk Desner's flip-downs, the kids on the team had seen through him and fried his ass. The time he'd cheated on Syl, Syl had seen through him, broken off their engagement, and cheated on him, with Charles, which had fried his ass possibly worse than any single other ass-frying he'd ever had, in a life that, it recently seemed, was simply a series of escalating ass-fries.

What, that Donfrey doofus never made a mistake in his life? Mom said in his head. Was never inadvertently involved in something unfortunate that sadly occurred? And now wants to label you a dick, or scum, or a bad immature person, because of one small mistake? Does that seem fair? Don't you think he's probably needed forgiveness sometime in his life?

Probably, Roosten said.

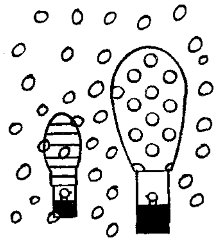
Oh, definitely, Mom said. I've known and loved you all your life, Al, and there's not a mean bone in your body. You are Al Roosten. Don't forget that. Sometimes you think something's wrong with you, but every time, turns out, there isn't. Why beat yourself up about this and, in so doing, miss the beauty of the actual moment?

The lilt of Mom's voice in his head cheered him.

He pulled out of the driveway. Mom was right. The world was beautiful. Here was the pioneer graveyard with its leaning yellowed stones. Here was the very vivid Jiffy Lube. A dense ball of birds went linear, then settled into the branches of a lightning-blasted tree. He knew it wasn't really Mom in his head. He was just imagining what Mom would have said. Who knew what Mom would have said? She could be a crazy old broad there at the end. But he sure missed her.

He thought again of the crippled girl. They'd missed the appointment and had to reschedule. The only available slot was months away. In the dark of night, she reached down for her bent foot and let out a groan. She'd been so close, so close to getting—

That was crap. That was negative. You had to let the healing begin. You had to forgive yourself. Everyone knew that. You had to love yourself. What was positive? The shop: thinking up ways to improve it, make it halfway decent, bring it back to life. He could put in a coffee bar. Tear out that old stained rug. There, he was feeling better already. You had to have joy. Joy kept a guy going. Once he got the shop viable, he'd go beyond that, make it great. Lines of people would be waiting when he arrived every morning. As he pushed his way through the crowd in his mind, everyone seemed to be asking, with smiles and pats on his back, would he consider running for mayor? Would he do for the town what he'd done for Bygone Daze?



Ha-ha, what a fun deal that would be, running for mayor. What colors would his banners be? What was his slogan?

Al Roosten, Friend to All. That was good.

Al Roosten, the Best Among Us. Too vain.

Al Roosten: Like You, Only Better.

Ha-ha.

Here was the shop. Nobody was waiting to get in. A muddy tarp had blown over from the junk yard and plastered itself against the window. Across from the junk yard was the viaduct where the hoboes hung out. Those hoboes were ruining his—

He believed they preferred to be called "homeless." Hadn't he read that? "Hobo" being derogatory? Jesus, that took nerve. Guy never works a day in his life, just goes around stealing pies off windowsills, then starts yelping about his rights? He'd like to walk up to a homeless and call him a hobo. He would, he'd do it, he'd grab that damn hobo by the collar and go, Hey, hobo, you're ruining my business. I've missed my rent two months in a row. Go back to the foreign country you probably—

He just really hated those beggars walking past his shop with their crude signs. Couldn't they at least spell right? Yesterday one had walked by with a sign that said, "Please help homless." He'd felt like shouting, Hey, sorry you lost your hom! They spent enough time under that viaduct, couldn't they at least proofread each other's—

As he parked the car, his mind went strangely blank. Where was he? The shop. Ugh. Where were his keys? On the same old ugly lanyard, impossible to get out of your pocket.

Jesus, he couldn't stand the thought of going in.

Mag and the boys were counting on him.

He sat a minute, breathing deeply.

An old man in filthy clothes staggered up the street, dragging a cardboard square on which, no doubt, he slept. His teeth were ghoulish, his eyes wet and red. Roosten imagined himself leaping from the car, knocking the man to the ground, kicking him and kicking him, teaching him, in this way, a valuable lesson on how to behave.

The man gave Roosten a weak smile, and Roosten gave the man a weak smile back. ♦

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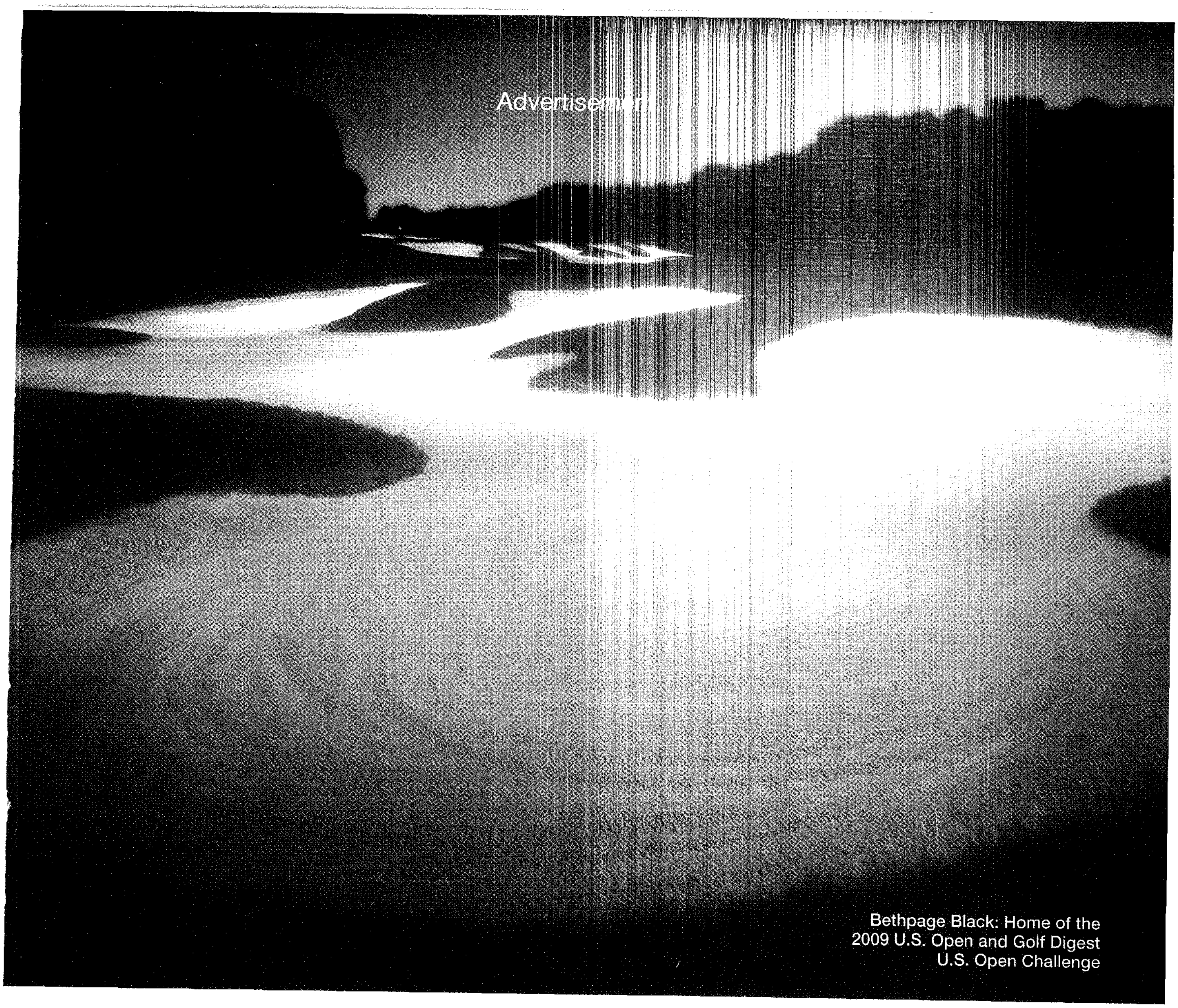

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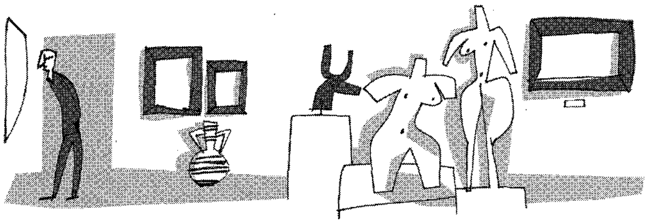


ON TELEVISION

A PLACE CALLED HOPE

Cable news captures the noise of the nation at Obama's Inauguration.

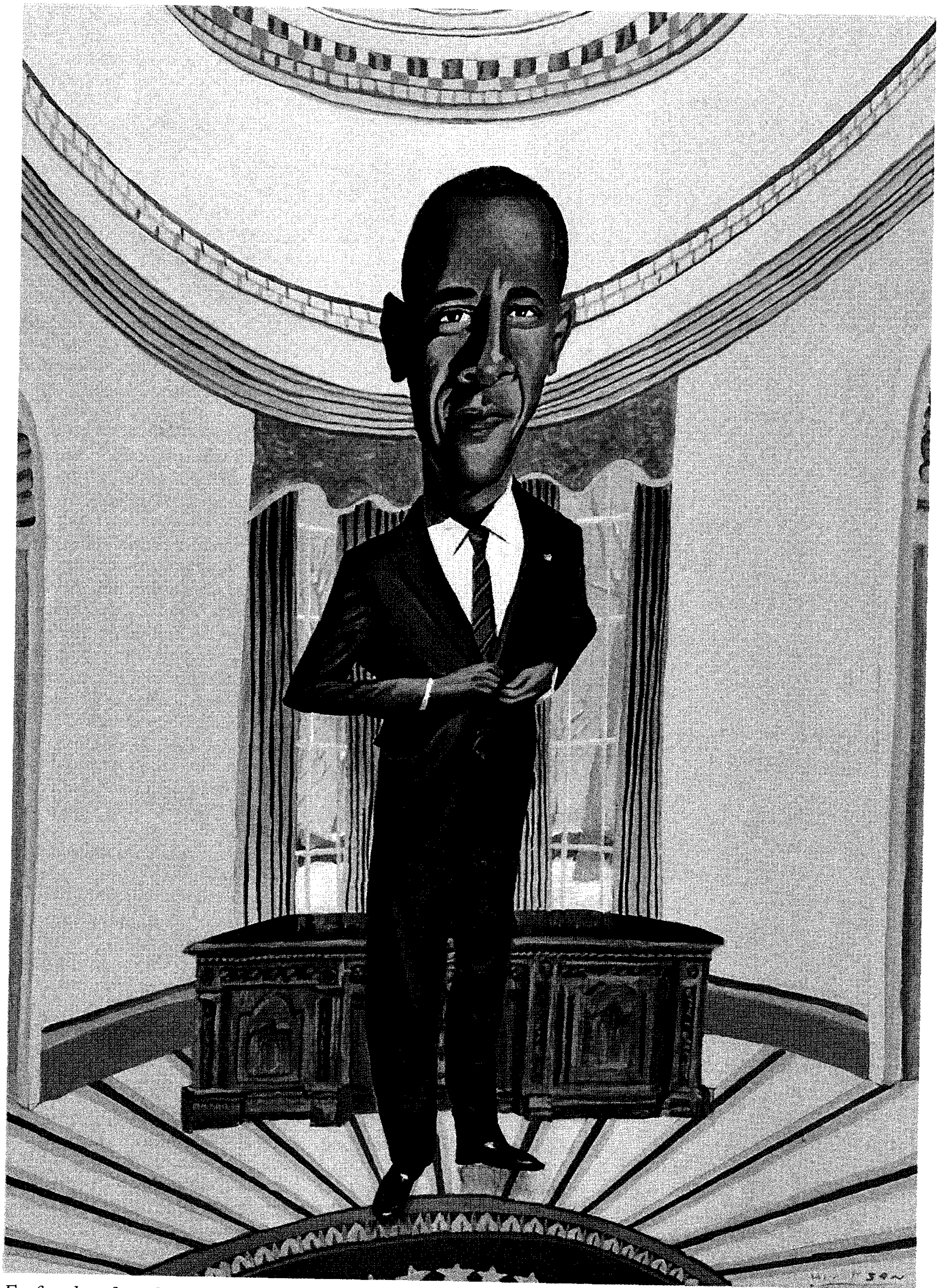
BY NANCY FRANKLIN

The Inauguration of Barack Obama as the forty-fourth President of the United States had much to interest those whose attention may not have been held by the historical and global import of the occasion. The trains, birthdays, weather, coincidences, glitches, music, dresses, hats, kids, magic screens, and fun facts—news anchors enjoyed announcing the capital's Great Toilet Shortage, for instance, which meant one portable facility for every six thousand people, while at the same time worrying idly that their constant repetition of that off-putting statistic would, in fact, put people off—were easily enough to keep such people in front of their televisions for much of the four days of hoopla. The Inauguration really lasted a little more than two weeks, beginning with Obama's arrival in Washington on January 4th, the night before his daughters started school—one of those hurry-up-and-wait situations which had cable anchors vamping for a couple of hours while cameras showed us static pictures of the airport, and then played and replayed a brief shot of the President-elect descending the stairs from the plane and tucking into a waiting car. What didn't need to be said then was that this image would very soon be bookended by its counterpart, George W. Bush's walk up the stairs into the plane that would take him back home, to Texas, on the very day that Obama was sworn in—a moment that itself seemed to be alive and eager to arrive, looking at its watch, tapping its feet, ready for the curtain to part so it could take the stage.

There was so much resonance in every element of the inaugural ceremonies and celebrations that sometimes the harmonic buzzing was almost too much. On Saturday the seventeenth, three days before Inauguration Day, Obamapalooza kicked off with a train ride that took the President-elect and his family from Philadelphia to Washington, with stops in Wilmington, to pick up Vice-President-elect Joe Biden and his wife, and Baltimore, and a couple of what were called "slow rolls" along the way. The ride echoed Abraham Lincoln's entry into Washington, and, as every civic-minded, TV-watching citizen knows, 2009 is the two-hundredth anniversary of Lincoln's birth and the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the N.A.A.C.P. The train ride took place two days before Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, and on the day Michelle Obama turned forty-five. I'm here to tell you, though, that watching a train ride on TV is not very interesting, especially since cameras never got inside the car carrying the Obamas and the Bidens and the "everyday Americans," some forty of them, whom they'd invited along for the ride. What we did get to see was CNN's Candy Crowley in one of the press cars, and some blurry video of the view from there. This is where the fun facts come in. From the bottom of the screen on CNN, where the crawl used to be, and where there is now an only slightly more stately dispensing of data in a series of stacked boxes, we learned that the ride was a hundred and thirty-seven miles long, that Lincoln's trip, from Springfield, Illinois, took twelve days, and that he gave a hundred speeches during the journey. In the studio, the CNN reporter Tom Foreman stood next to one of those magic screens that CNN has and, with flicks of his fingers, made a map of the train's journey morph into aerial photographs that showed bridges and buildings along the route, and pointed out the security challenges. That kind of thing was actually all too interesting, as was finding out exactly where the train would cross the Mason-Dixon Line and hearing that Lincoln's train, as it approached Washington, was guarded extra heavily, because of assassination threats. If there was truly any thrill to Obama's train ride, it wasn't getting to see him on his way to make history; it was that he made it to Washington in, shall we say, good health. Just as nervous fliers may think they can keep a plane in the air by being hypervigilant, many of us think we can keep Obama safe by watching him every second; in a way, it was reassuring not to see too much of him on the journey—it meant that he was O.K., that we didn't have to worry about him.

It also meant that the correspondents and the commentators had a lot of airtime to fill. CNN's people had parked themselves outdoors in Washington, in order to bring us closer to the inaction. Bundled up in heavy coats and scarves and hats, Wolf Blitzer, Anderson Cooper, Soledad O'Brien, and Roland Martin seemed mostly to talk about the weather, though we also got to hear that O'Brien had come down from New York on the same train as Beyoncé. Over on MSNBC, Chris Matthews was his usual combination of extremely embarrassing and kind of insightful. Getting giddy with Adrian Fenty, the mayor of the District of Columbia, who has the same kind of parentage as Obama—a black father, a white mother—Matthews said, "You're young, you're clean, you're new—ha, just kidding." But he also, more than most of the people on TV that weekend, talked about race directly, asking Fenty how Washington

ABOVE: LENE DUE-JENSEN; OPPOSITE: MARK ULRIKSEN



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became a black city, and also pointing out that this Inauguration had brought black and white Washingtonians together as never before. It was, he said, "the first time that D.C. has come to Washington."

What really illustrated the rainbow that was Washington during the four days of pomp and parties wasn't the commentators' words but the images. One MSNBC shot moving down the street (which street I don't know; despite all the maps on display, it was hard to get your bearings while watching from home) showed, within a matter of seconds, a man in a turban, an Asian face, a black face, a white face, an old face, and many, many young faces. Then Matthews, as only Matthews can, brought things back to the wince-worthy, saying to Sheryl Crow things like "I was impressed by your family. You're not one of those weird Hollywood crowds, all broken up."

Tuesday finally rolled around, with CNN's countdown clock ticking down the hours and minutes until the Inauguration ceremony; any viewers who were planning on attending had previously been asked by CNN to e-mail pictures of "the moment"—Obama raising his hand to take the oath of office—to the network, whose gadgets would then create a huge composite, three-dimensional-seeming photograph. As new as the ability to accomplish such a thing may be, it came across as a tired gimmick. History was happening; it was a day of ecstasy and gravity—and CNN wanted your cell-phone pictures. But the day simply couldn't be captured that way. (As for Fox News, I turned to it many times during the Inauguration, but all the foxy newsies I saw were well behaved and enthusiastic, and I had very little to hang my antipathy on. Still, as much as Murdoch's minions got into the spirit of things, I couldn't help noticing that when the Obamas got out of their car during the parade on Tuesday afternoon and strode down Pennsylvania Avenue, the sounds of the crowd—and the crowd really did go wild—were very loud on CNN, just right on MSNBC, and rather muted on Fox News.)

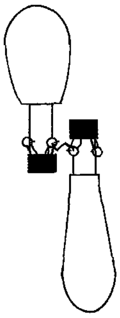
Watching the Inauguration on TV was frustrating, though you could see what you needed to see—the procession that President Bush and President-elect Obama made toward the podium, the ritual gestures between them and their spouses, the swearing-in itself, and Bush's departure in a helicopter. (And a few things you didn't need to see: a child in the privileged seats near the podium chewing gum. I may be mistaken, but I believe I also saw Michelle Obama's brother chewing gum. Not cool, guys.) The pictures of the crowds, rolling back in what really did look like waves, from the Capitol all the way to the Lincoln Memorial—from sea to shining sea, it almost seemed—were repeated over and over, and were never less than flabbergasting each time. But, oh, the swearing-in! Could you *believe* it? As Stephen Colbert called John Roberts on his show, the Justice Chief of the Court Supreme blew the recitation of the oath in a way that many people will never forgive him for. Really, Obama's seven-year-old daughter, Sasha, could have done a better job. Still, we all managed to move beyond that, as we looked forward to the gala evening. Whether or not this was the greatest day in American history—and it may have been—it was what happened that night that made Americans take the First Family to their hearts, if the two adorable First Daughters hadn't already seen to that. Dancing to the very grownup, sexy song "At Last," the Obamas were both hot and cool, as attractive in their affection as a couple can possibly be.

The morning after the Inauguration, something felt wrong to me. I was sad and unsettled, as if I'd had a bad dream. Later in the day, I realized how far away I'd felt from the events of the previous days. I'd seen Obama become President, verified that—*phew!*—it had actually happened, but I hadn't felt connected to it, except, oddly enough, when I watched scenes of other people watching it on TV, like elderly black men and women, who sat at home and wept as they saw something that they had never imagined would happen. I should have put the remote down and got myself to Washington and stood in the crowd, freezing and cheering, maybe even, for the first time, waving a flag. January 20th might have been the greatest day in my lifetime. By watching it on TV, I'd missed it. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Brothers, *by Yu Hua, translated from the Chinese by Eileen Cheng-yin Chow and Carlos Rojas (Pantheon; $29.95).* Yu Hua's impressive fifth novel, a family history documenting four decades of profound social and cultural transformation in China, begins on a toilet. In a sleepy rural outpost known as Liu Town, fourteen-year-old Baldy Li is caught peeping at women's bottoms in a latrine. He becomes known as a compulsive public masturbator, and his obsession continues into adulthood: he ends up hosting a beauty pageant for virgins (all of whom rely on doctored hymens to gain entrance). The book has sold more than a million copies in China, despite its irreverent take on everything from the Cultural Revolution to the capitalist boom. A characterization of Baldy's notoriety can also be applied to this relentlessly entertaining epic: "Though his reputation reeked, it reeked like an expensive dish of stinky tofu—which is to say, it might stink to high heaven, but damn, it sure tasted good."

Lark and Termite, *by Jayne Anne Phillips (Knopf; $24).* This poetic novel alternates between the last hours of Robert Leavitt, a corporal in the U.S. Army, pinned down in a tunnel in South Korea, in 1950, and the story of his disabled son, Termite, who, nine years later, is living with his half sister, Lark, and their aunt in West Virginia. Lark knows little of her mother and even less of her father, and pours herself into nurturing Termite, whose stunted body and lack of language has Social Services perpetually threatening to take him away. The appearance of a sympathetic social worker marks the beginning of a great fracture in their lives, which culminates in a flood that reveals the past and makes way for a new future. Phillips gives each scene an evocative, often lyrical description, but the mystical elements of the story and the improbable ending undermine an otherwise moving exploration of familial love.



The Invention of Air, *by Steven Johnson (Riverhead; $25.95).* The author of "Everything Bad Is Good for You" provides an entertaining account of the eighteenth-century scientist and radical Joseph Priestley's monumental discovery that plants restore "something fundamental"—what we now know as oxygen—to the air. Johnson also offers a clear-sighted and intelligent exploration of the conditions that are propitious to scientific innovation, such as the availability of coffee and the unfettered circulation of information through social networks. The members of the networks that Priestley belonged to, including Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, provide Johnson with some of his strongest material. But he sometimes overstates the relationship between politics and science, particularly when he strains to make the case that Priestley, after fleeing England in 1794, became a pivotal figure in the formation of the American republic.

Thames, *by Peter Ackroyd (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday; $40).* This lavishly produced volume is Ackroyd's omnivorous paean to "the shortest river in the world to acquire such a famous history." Eschewing standard organization, Ackroyd jumps from today's posh London banks to Roger Bacon's observatory at Grandpont to Dickens's "deathlike and mysterious" waterway. We learn about the riverbank's many species of willow (white, weeping, crack, cane osier), and about the Retribution and the Belliqueux, eighteenth-century prison boats that each held hundreds of men. A chapter on types of sludge through history makes one grateful for today's raw sewage, as opposed to the "Intrails of bestes" that washed up in the fifteenth century. A survey of the many ways in which the river can kill notes that most Thames suicides remain "anonymous and unlamented." Not every tidbit will appeal to every reader, but the book demands to be read as it was written, according to one's fancy.

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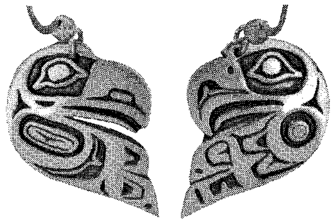

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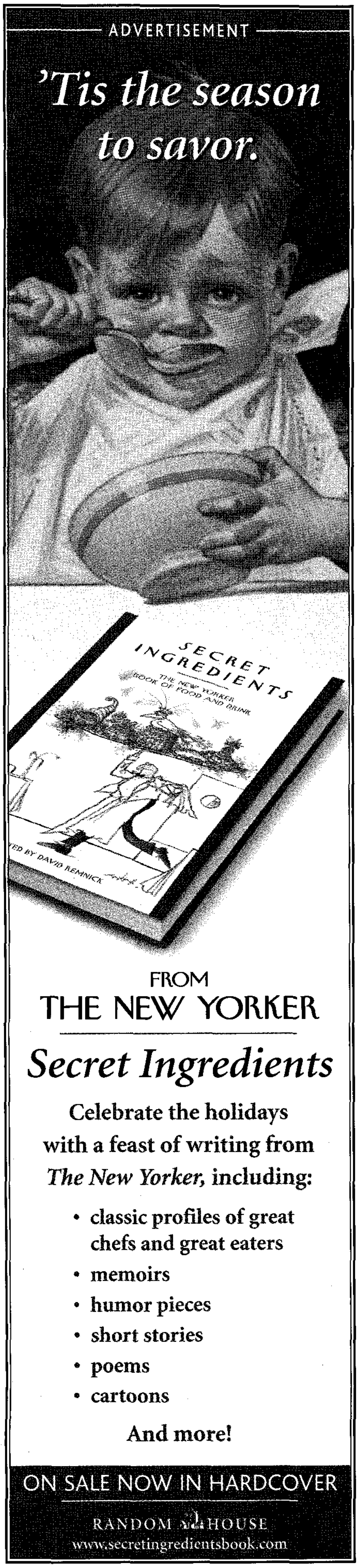
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HEROES AND ZEROES

When central bankers rescued, then ruined, the world.

BY JOHN LANCHESTER

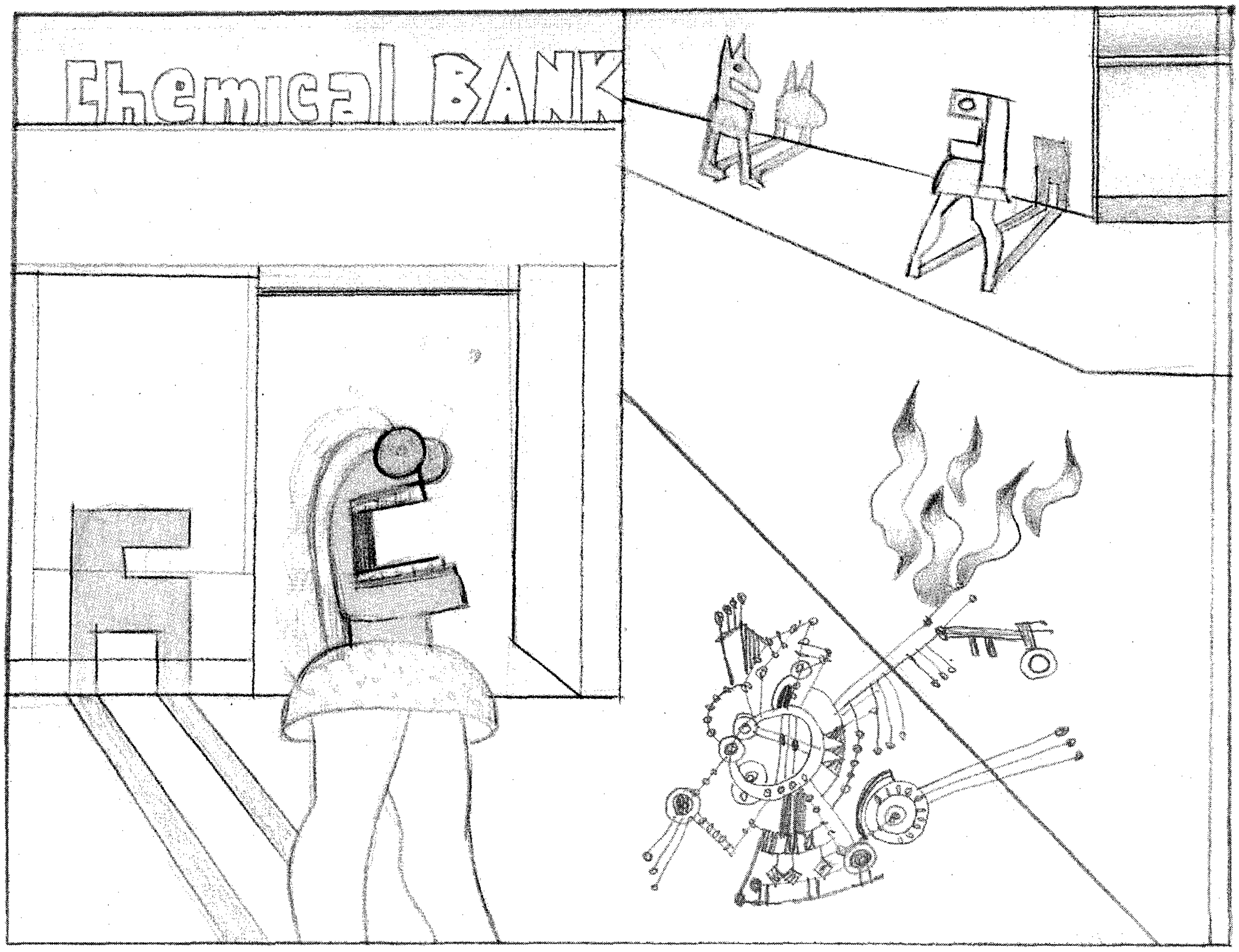
As a child, I was frightened of A.T.M.s. Specifically, I was frightened of the first A.T.M. I ever saw, the one outside the imposing headquarters of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, at 1 Queen's Road Central, Hong Kong. This would have been around 1970, when I was eight. My father, being an employee of the bank, was an early adopter of the A.T.M., which stood just to one side of the building's iconic bronze lions, but every time I saw him use it I panicked. What if the machine got its sums wrong and took all our money? What if the machine took someone else's money by mistake, and my father went to prison? What if the machine said it was giving him only ten dollars but actually took much more out of his account—some unimaginably large sum, like fifty or a hundred dollars? The freedom with which the machine coughed up its cash, and the invitation to go straight out and spend it, seemed horribly reckless. The flow of money, from our account out through the machine and then into the world, just seemed too easy. My dad would stand there grimly tapping in his PIN number while I hung onto his arm and begged him to stop.

My scaredy-cat eight-year-old self was on to something. The sheer frictionlessness with which money moves around the world is frightening; it can induce a kind of vertigo. This can happen when you are reading the financial news and suddenly feel that you have no grip on what the numbers actually mean—what those millions and billions and trillions actually represent, how to get hold of them in your mind. (Try the following thought experiment, suggested by the mathematician John Allen Paulos, in his book "Innumeracy": Without doing the calculation, guess how long a million seconds is. Now try to guess the same for a billion seconds. Ready? A million seconds is less than twelve days; a billion is almost thirty-two years.) Or it can happen when you look at a bank statement and contemplate the terrible potency of those strings of digits, their ability to dictate everything from what you eat to where you live—the abstract numerals whose consequences are the least abstract thing in the world. Or it can happen when the global flow of capital suddenly hits you personally—when your apparently thriving employer goes out of business owing to a problem with credit, or your mortgage payments jump unpayably upward—and you think, Just what is this money stuff, anyway? I can see its effects—I can thumb a banknote, flip a coin—but what is it, actually? What do these abstract numbers stand for? What is the thing that's being represented? Wouldn't it be reassuring if it was more like a physical thing, and less like an idea? Wouldn't the global financial system be less vertiginous, less bizarre, if your money actually stood for something?

The answer to that question is no, and we know this because the system was in effect for years and—to borrow a phrase from the subtitle of Liaquat Ahamed's new book, "Lords of Finance" (Penguin; $32.95)—it "broke the world." The system was the gold standard, and it involved the world's major currencies being pegged against gold in a way that was, in theory, redeemable: that is, you could go to the bank and exchange your currency for a specified amount of gold. In the United States, it was 23.22 grains of gold to the dollar; in the United Kingdom, it was 113 grains to the pound sterling. (A grain is based on the notional weight of a grain of wheat: 1/7,000 of a pound.) By fixing currencies to gold, the gold standard also fixed them to each other. In addition, the central banks, which had a monopoly on printing and distributing money, were obliged by law to keep the amount of money in circulation linked to the amount of gold in their reserves. This was not just a local issue but a planetary one. Even the most vertigo-

SAUL STEINBERG, "STREET WAR" (DETAIL), (C. 1972-74) © THE SAUL STEINBERG FOUNDATION

prone of us, those who are least comfortable with the abstractness of modern money, can begin to spot a problem here: what if the world needs more money? What if all the gold is in the wrong place, or there isn't enough of it?



In the nineteen-twenties, the great central bankers were considered heroes. Then they led the world into economic catastrophe.

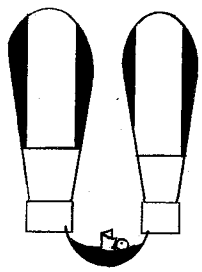
These turn out to be good questions. Liaquat Ahamed's book stretches from the beginning of the First World War to the setting up of the Bretton Woods system to regulate the global flows of capital, at the end of the Second. At the time his story begins, Ahamed estimates that the entire global supply of gold can be stored in a two-story town house. Most of it is to be found in the vaults of the world's central banks, doing the passive work of propping up the respective national currencies. The men in charge of the gold are the heads of those central banks, and it is they who are the central figures of Ahamed's book.

That might make the story sound dry—but it isn't, not at all. The central banks turn out to be unexpectedly rickety institutions. Most of them had an odd semi-private, semi-public status, as privately owned companies with a legal monopoly on printing money. The oldest of the four central banks that Ahamed writes about, the Bank of England, was founded in 1694 to help pay for the latest installment of the European wars, and it was set up by a group of Protestant merchants, several of them French Huguenot refugees, who made the following offer: the government would get a loan of 1.2 million pounds in perpetuity, at an interest rate of eight per cent. In return, the bank would be allowed to issue 1.2 million pounds in banknotes, and have the exclusive right to be the government's banker. So the setting up of the central bank was a mutually beneficial deal to create a monopoly—with the faint but perceptible smell of a conspiracy against the public. This trend was to continue. America's first modern central bank was established in 1913, in the teeth of strong populist suspicion of bankers. The men who conceived it were worried about the perception that they were forming a cabal, and so did what you naturally do when you're worried about that: they travelled by private train, under pseudonyms, to a top-secret meeting at a private island off the coast of Georgia.

The institution they envisioned became the Federal Reserve, and it was a compromise from the start. The bankers wanted a single central bank, but opposition in Congress watered the plan down so that it created twelve autonomous regional institutions overseen by a board of governors appointed by the President. Benjamin Strong, the first head of the New York Federal Reserve Bank—which, it was soon clear, would be the most important of the twelve branches—had been at the island meeting, and supported a single central bank. Strong argued, in Ahamed's words, that the Federal

Reserve's "decentralized structure would simply perpetuate the fragmentation and diffusion of authority that had so bedeviled American banking and would only lead to conflict and confusion."

Strong was right about that; he was right about many things, and, of the four central bankers in Ahamed's book, he is the one who seemed to have the most flexibility of mind—though he could also be forceful to the point of brutishness. He died in 1928, just before the end of the bull run and the subsequent crash; if he had lived, Ahamed thinks, the United States might have done a much better job of managing its way through the subsequent economic turmoil.



The three other men lived through that turmoil, and didn't do a great job of trying to alleviate it. It may not have helped that they all had personalities that teetered on the verge of self-caricature. The oddest of them was Montagu Norman, the governor of the Bank of England, which at the time of the First World War was, thanks to its age and its place at the center of the British Empire, the most powerful financial institution in the world. Norman was a clever man, and a world-class flake—a bohemian who cultivated a voluptuous Vandyke beard, preferred the company of artists and designers to that of his colleagues, and usually dressed in a floppy hat and a cloak. He was a neurotic, an obsessive about secrecy, a manic-depressive, and a sometime Theosophist, who once told a colleague that he could walk through walls. If he were a children's entertainer, you would decide not to employ him after checking out the photo on his Web site. He travelled under the pseudonym Professor Clarence Skinner, as part of his policy of maximum shiftiness; when asked by a British government select committee what his reasons were for a particular decision, he tapped his nose three times and said, "I don't have reasons. I have instincts." Try that one on Henry Waxman.

The climax of Norman's career was in 1925, when he prevailed on Winston Churchill, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, to return Britain to the gold standard—the fixed rate having been abandoned during the war. Churchill was no financial guru. He recalled how his father, Randolph, who had also been Chancellor, talked about struggling with decimal points: "I never could make out what those damned dots meant." In later years, Churchill saw the return to the gold standard as "the biggest blunder" of his life: "I had no special comprehension of the currency problem and therefore fell into the hands of the experts, as I never did later where military matters were concerned." He often ranted about "that man Skinner." In the short run, though, Norman got the credit for the restoration of the international financial system. He was a heroic success, before he was a heroic failure—a trajectory common to all four of Ahamed's subjects.

The second temporary hero of inter-war finance was Horace Greeley Hjalmar Schacht. (His father gave him his first two names, which he didn't use, in honor of the founding editor of the New York *Tribune*.) Schacht was the German central banker who took the credit for rescuing the German currency from the hyperinflation that overtook it after the First World War. By the early nineteen-twenties, the German economy, damaged by defeat, had become crippled by the attempt to pay the reparations demanded by the victorious European Allies and simultaneously develop a social-welfare state. The government printed as much money as it could, and inflation was running out of control. In 1914, the German mark had stood at 4.2 to the dollar; by 1922, it was 190 to the dollar; by the end of that year, it was 7,600. By November, 1923, a dollar was worth 630 billion marks, a loaf of bread cost 140 billion marks, and Germany was disintegrating under the strain. Schacht was appointed currency commissioner, and took charge of the project to issue a new currency, the Rentenmark, whose value was underpinned not by gold but by land. (For a short period, Germany had two legal currencies.) The Rentenmark held its value, helped by such drastic measures as the firing of a quarter of the government's workforce. Schacht became a national hero. He seems to have been a spectacularly unpleasant man, whose physical rigidity, starched collars, and stiff gait offer a precise parallel to his prickly, arrogant personality—a man who embodied to full effect negative stereotypes of the petty bureaucrat and the banker. He struck a contemporary as "a compound of a Prussian reserve officer and a budding Prussian judge who is trying to copy the officer." In later life, he worked with the Nazis, though he never joined the Party, and eventually became so disillusioned with Hitler that he was involved in conspiracies to overthrow him. Schacht was tried with leading members of the regime at Nuremberg (where John Dos Passos described him as looking "like an angry walrus"), and was acquitted. After several more trials, and a solitary conviction that was overturned on appeal, he lived in freedom until his death, in 1970, at the age of ninety-three.

Émile Moreau, the fourth lord of finance, was another hard banker to love, a blunt version of the classic French *haut fonctionnaire*, preoccupied with questions of national status. As head of the Banque de France, he had the greatest success of any European central banker in the years after the First World War. His masterstroke was to hold the value of the franc to a low level. Germany was crippled by war reparations and inflation, and Britain had gone back to the gold standard at too high a level. For the British, the postwar years saw a textbook deflationary trap. Prices were falling, but interest rates were kept high to protect the pound, which in turn made exports too expensive. The result was rocketing unemployment and a general strike. In contrast, Moreau, by keeping the franc cheap, presided over a boom in exports. All those foreigners buying inexpensive French goods meant that France was sucking up money. The Fed, thanks to the American wartime boom, had most of the world's gold; the Banque de France now had much of the rest. The analogy would be a poker game in which two players have won nearly all the chips, and no one else can play. Montagu Norman was one of the people who foresaw disaster but were unable to prevent it. He wrote to Moreau that "unless drastic measures are taken to save it, the capitalist system throughout the civilised world will be wrecked within a year."

It's easy to be reminded, by all this, of more recent events. It's also easy to see history through the eyes of the present, and make people look stupid for not knowing what we know. Liaquat Ahamed has the imagination not to do that. While he makes clear the ways in which his protagonists were wrong, he doesn't judge them anachronistically. He shows just how hard it is to be right when one is confronted with new facts and unfamiliar developments. He was inspired to write the book by a 1999 issue of *Time* with the cover line "The Committee to Save the World," featuring a photograph of Alan Greenspan, Robert Rubin, and Lawrence Summers. The occasion for the piece was the 1997-98 meltdown in developing markets, and the ensuing collapse of Long-Term Capital Management, which, by some estimates, risked blowing a trillion-dollar hole in the world economic system. Ahamed was an investment manager during this period, and his book is informed by an awareness of how unprecedented events look at the time they are being lived through—an awareness that helps to make his book seem timely today.

Would a book about the men in charge of today's global financial system be called "The Committee to Save the World"? Or "The Bankers Who Broke the World"? It's too early to say, though it's not too early to ask—and one should bear in mind that the consensus opinion on these things tends to fluctuate. You may well have been taught in school the same thing I was taught, that the New Deal brought an end to the Great Depression; but, of a hundred economists surveyed in the mid-nineties, nearly half agreed with the proposition "Taken as a whole, government policies of the New Deal served to lengthen and deepen the Great Depression." The present calamity will probably be the subject of debate for as long as the crash and the Depression have been, and will provide equally rich material. Consider Ben Bernanke and Henry Paulson: the slouchy Jewish academic who, thank God, made a special study of the causes of the Great Depression; and the aerobicized Christian Scientist former head of Goldman Sachs. The scenario resembles a movie pitch: Danny DeVito and Arnold Schwarzenegger—and they're twins! As for Calvin Coolidge, the President who, in Ahamed's words, "elevated inaction to a point of principle": not hard to think of a latter-day parallel for him. And then there's the cast of differingly motivated, ideologically disparate foreigners, each trying to build his or her own national life raft: Gordon Brown, Angela Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy. Perhaps most fascinating of all is the man who was at the center of that Committee to Save the World and who got most of the credit for the boom before it turned into a bust: Alan Greenspan.

The crucial questions in history often turn out to involve things that people at the time simply did not understand. Sometimes these things were too complicated to be resolved, and sometimes they were so glaringly obvious that they were hidden in plain sight. Sometimes they were both at the same time: horribly complex, horribly obvious. In the buildup to the 1929 crash and the subsequent depression, the linked issues of reparations and the gold standard were at once unfixably complicated and so much at the heart of the system that they were hard to see plainly. The equivalent issue at the heart of the current financial meltdown is that of risk. For reasons to do with a lack of historical awareness, overconfidence, and faulty mathematical modelling, the entire global financial system was built on mistaken calculations about probability.

Greenspan, who more than anyone else was central to this system, told the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on October 23rd that the crisis was prompted by "a once-in-a-century credit tsunami," which had arisen from the collapse of a "whole intellectual edifice." "Those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders' equity—myself especially—are in a state of shocked disbelief," he said. This failure of self-interest to provide self-regulation was, he said, "a flaw in the model that I perceived as the critical functioning structure that defines how the world works." It's worth dwelling on that phrase: "the critical functioning structure that defines how the world works." That's a hell of a big thing to find a flaw in. Here's another way of describing that flaw: the people in power thought they knew more than they did. The bankers evidently knew too much math and not enough history—or maybe they didn't know enough of either.

Montagu Norman, that odd, lonely man who was once the most powerful central banker in the world, came to feel that his life had been largely futile. Reflecting on his work and that of his friend Ben Strong, of the New York Fed, he wrote, "As I look back, it now seems that, with all the thought and work and good intentions . . . nothing that I did, and very little that old Ben did, internationally produced any good effect—or indeed any effect at all except that we collected money from a lot of poor devils and gave it over to the four winds." ♦

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THE NEW YORKER

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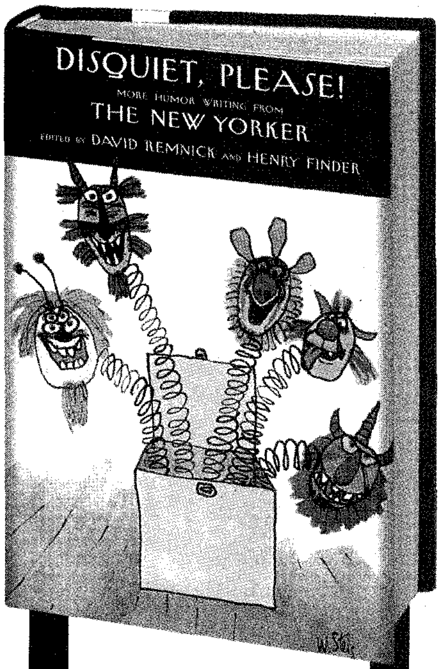

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THE SKY LINE

CENTER STAGE

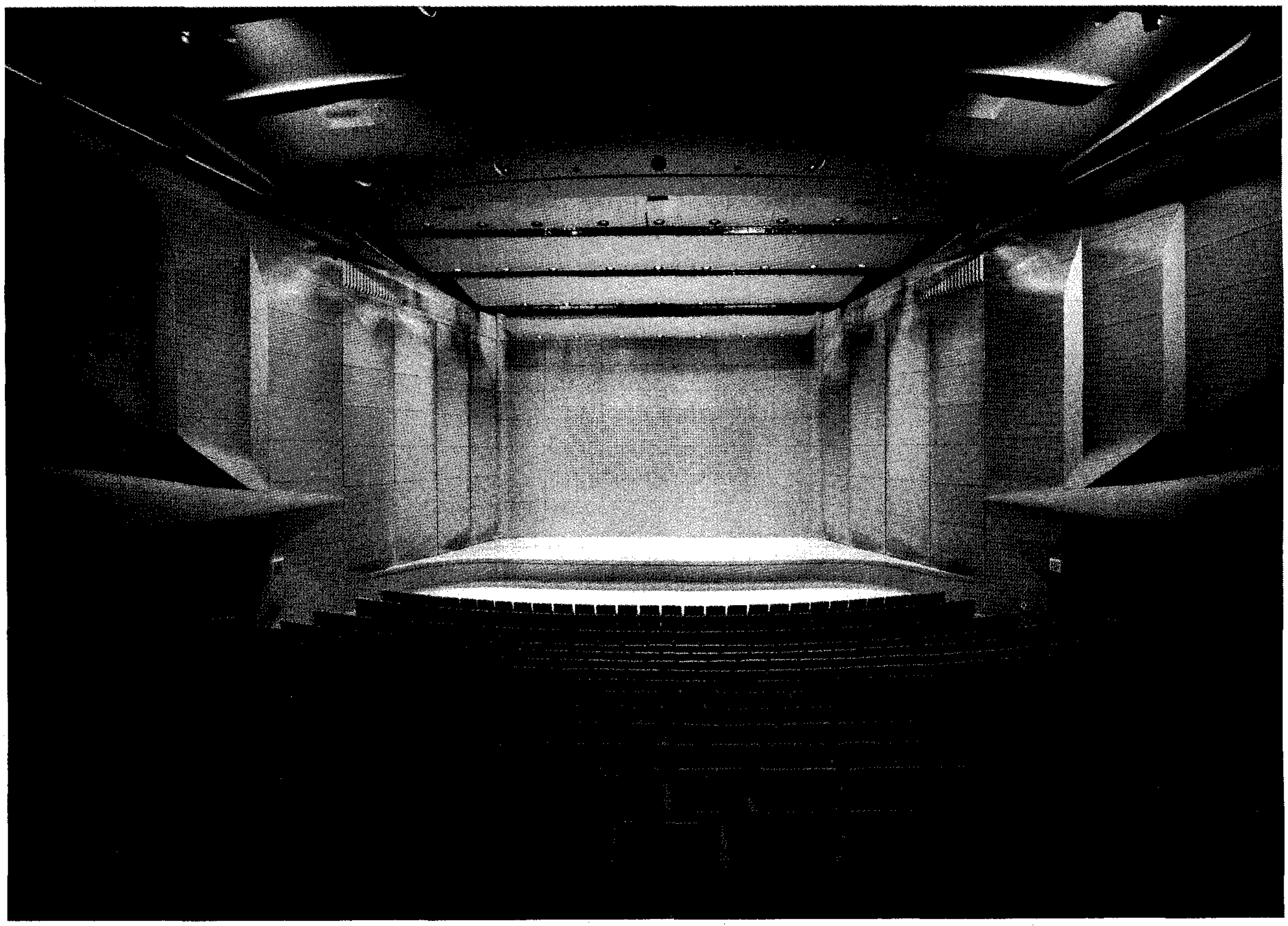
The new Alice Tully Hall bodes well for other Lincoln Center renovations.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

Alice Tully Hall, and the Juilliard School complex of which it is a part, were the last elements of Lincoln Center to be built, and when they opened, in 1969, they seemed like an ambitious attempt to bring cutting-edge brutalism to the place. That's probably why so many architecture critics liked them and so many other people didn't. Amid the tepid classicism of so much of Lincoln Center, Juilliard stood out as something totally nineteen-sixties, all cantilevers and boxy geometries. Granted, it was covered in travertine, to match its genteel neighbors, but that served only to make the building seem ill at ease, like a wrestler dressed in a Sunday suit.

The building was a misfit in other ways, too. Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center's main venue for chamber music and recitals, was supposed to be its most conspicuous public element, but the entrance was half hidden behind a stairway that led up to a bleak, windswept plaza. It was also separated from the street by a small, virtually useless triangular plaza, a result of the insistence by the architects, Pietro Belluschi and Eduardo Catalano, on a rectangular building, even though the site, facing the diagonal of Broadway, was a trapezoid. If you were going to Juilliard instead of to Alice Tully, the front door was even harder to find—off the plaza, one level above the street.

So there is a certain justice in the way that this structure, designed with apparent disdain for the traditionalism of its neighbors, has turned out to be the first part of Lincoln Center to be radically rebuilt. (I'm not counting Avery Fisher Hall, the Philharmonic's acoustically challenged concert auditorium, whose interior has been redone four times, but whose exterior remains intact.) In February, Alice Tully will reopen as, for all intents and purposes, an entirely new hall. Large sections of the surrounding Juilliard building have been renovated, and almost nothing about approaching, entering, and being inside the complex is the way it was. The architects, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, have stretched Juilliard's rigid box all the way to Broadway, giving the building a shape that, at last, reflects the outline of the site. They have covered the new Broadway side of the building in glass—including a spectacular dance studio on the second floor which seems to float over the entrance. And they created a new front door by cutting a huge diag-



The interior of Alice Tully Hall feels warmer and more intimate than before. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

onal swath out of the southeast corner of the building. From some angles, it looks as if a giant had wrenched the building out of its foundation by lifting up the corner. When you get close to the door, the corner seems to loom over you, like an enormous triangular canopy. Forty years after Alice Tully Hall opened, it finally has an entrance that you notice.

Architects sometimes talk of design elements as "moves," as if they were playing a game of chess, and when dealing with problematic older buildings the chess analogy is apt. You are more likely to succeed if you craft a strategy consisting of a lot of carefully considered small moves, not one big one. That's one reason for the failure of Frank Gehry's plan, a few years back, to solve Lincoln Center's problems by putting a gargantuan glass dome over the main plaza. Move by move, you have to take your cues from the architecture that is already there, but you can't let the older building dictate everything, either. Liz Diller, Ric Scofidio, and Charles Renfro, along with their associate architects, the firm of FXFowle, have figured out the balance. They joust with Belluschi's architecture, but they never try to kill off the old structure. They manage to be bold and subtle at the same time, making a dull building exciting without warping its identity completely.

Belluschi wouldn't have liked the renovation, an affront to his doctrinaire modernism, but almost every change has made this building better—both more alive and more functional. From Sixty-fifth Street, it looks almost the same, and where the architects have extended the south side to the corner of Broadway they even copy Belluschi's travertine façade—perhaps as a gesture of homage, but also more likely because nothing else would make sense there. Yet from Broadway you see only the new material, and the building becomes another thing entirely, a vibrant composition of glass and metal that looks, and feels, strikingly new. Previously, once you found the door, you entered a cramped vestibule and then walked down several steps to a low-ceilinged, carpeted lobby that felt like a basement. Now, when you pass through the corner entrance, you find yourself in a vast glass-enclosed space—it includes most of the area where the triangular plaza used to be—that is full of light and open to views of the surrounding city.

In terms of its configuration and the precision of its details, this is probably the most urbane lobby at Lincoln Center. It avoids the grandiosity of Philip Johnson's space at the State Theatre and the sappy romanticism of Wallace K. Harrison's Metropolitan Opera lobby. One wall of the new lobby is covered in muirapiranga, a Brazilian wood, set in narrow tongue-and-groove panels. There is a huge freestanding café bar made of Portuguese limestone, with one end sculpted in the form of a flying wedge. It looks like a model of a building by Zaha Hadid, but more elegant. From the lobby, you enter the hall by going down a steep staircase, as before, and the hall, unlike the lobby, isn't bigger, but the interior has been totally redone. At Lincoln Center, gold and red velvet have usually carried the day, but the new hall is panelled in a veneer of moabi, an African wood, and its contours are softer and more rounded than before. The seats are covered in dark-gray suède. It's reserved, but it's not cold—indeed, the gray of the seats and the rust-orange of the wood make the hall feel warmer and more intimate. Like the lobby, the interior of the hall shows how much richness and complexity can be teased out of the modernist vocabulary in the right hands.

It's somewhat amazing that Lincoln Center hired Diller Scofidio + Renfro, instead of opting for any one of several starchitects who were short-listed. Until recently, the firm had focussed as much on multimedia installations as on real buildings, and even though their home for the Institute of Contemporary Art, on the Boston waterfront, finished in 2006, revealed their ability to produce significant architecture, it made clear that they would never have designed anything remotely like the original Lincoln Center buildings. Nonetheless, they have turned out to be exactly what the place needed. So far, their Lincoln Center work—which will include several additional phases of reconstruction, beyond Alice Tully—shows a rare talent for being assertive without being egotistical. The other work will be finished in stages over the next year or two, and it will address some of the key urban-design failures in the original Lincoln Center plan.

Chief among these is the treatment of West Sixty-fifth Street, which separates Alice Tully and Juilliard from the main campus. When Lincoln Center was designed, it was thought that a wide bridge extending the plaza over the street would be the right way to pull the two sites together. In fact, this ruined the street, turning it into a grim tunnel, and it brought no real benefit above. The genius of the redesign is to see the street not as a problem in need of covering up but as an asset whose energy can be harnessed. The bridge is gone, and Sixty-fifth Street is becoming a new spine for Lincoln Center, with street-level box offices, expanded facilities for the Lincoln Center Film Society, and a restaurant contained in a swooping new structure with a public lawn on its roof. The greatest design failing of Lincoln Center was its separation from the rest of the city, and the redo of Sixty-fifth Street will go a long way toward healing that breach.

But the most elegant thing Diller Scofidio + Renfro are doing is at Lincoln Center's main entrance, facing Columbus Avenue. The complex has always been difficult to approach, since you need to cross not only six lanes of traffic on Columbus (fourteen lanes if you count Broadway) but also a small roadway for taxi drop-off—an instance of the tendency of sixties planners to put vehicles ahead of foot traffic. The architects are sinking the roadway and elongating the stairway to the main plaza out over it, creating a grand approach. The stairway will have lots of high-tech gimmicks, like electronic messages in the risers which you will see as you approach—this is a Diller Scofidio + Renfro production, after all—but that's just surface decoration. The really wonderful thing isn't the modern tricks but the classical symmetry. Lincoln Center's plaza will never be more than a weak echo of Michelangelo's Campidoglio, in Rome (the most famous plaza with pavilions on three sides), but by placing this grand staircase on an axis with the fountain and the Metropolitan Opera, the architects have enhanced its strength as a work of classicism. It wasn't such a surprise that they could give modernism new life at Alice Tully Hall. But who would have thought that they could rescue Lincoln Center's classical side, too? ♦

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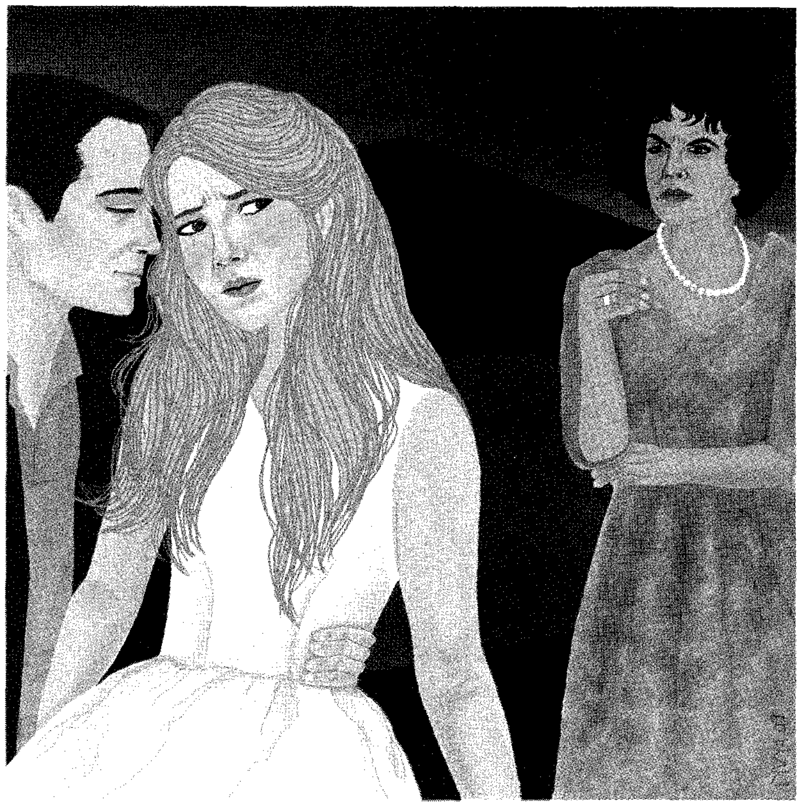
Video: Paul Goldberger at Lincoln Center.

THE THEATRE

SMOTHER LOVE

Richard Greenberg on a maternal power struggle.

BY JOHN LAHR



Three's a crowd: Campion, Rabe, and Ruehl in "The American Plan."

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

Did you come of age in those sweet summers of the early nineteen-sixties, when the airwaves were full of rock and roll's doo-wop promise of joy and the nation was full of J.F.K.'s eloquent promise of a New Frontier? I did. Life seemed to be laid out before us like a banquet; everything was for the taking, especially hearts. Richard Greenberg's "The American Plan" (an update of his début play, from 1990, elegantly directed by David Grindley, at the Samuel J. Friedman) opens in one such summer, on a lake in the Catskills. In Jonathan Fensom's well-conceived set, a raked dock overlooks the leafy frontage of a hotel across the lake. On the dock, a fetching, pony-tailed blond woman listlessly reads a book. Suddenly, a buff young man rises from the water like a pumped-up Poseidon, his smile and his pecs gleaming. "Oh . . . hi," he says, for clumsy openers. "I just took a swim." This godlike materialization foreshadows the omnipotence that the handsome man will come to represent; the young woman, it turns out, has been watching him all summer—and waiting for a savior.

She is Lili (Lily Rabe), the beautiful but nervy daughter of a wealthy, manipulative German Jewish émigré, Eva (Mercedes Ruehl), who is referred to locally—for her foreignness and her grandiosity—as "the Duchess." He is Nick (Kieran Campion), "more or less" a writer for *Time*—"the Weekly Cultural Epiphany," as he puts it mockingly—with aspirations of becoming an architect. From this somewhat incredible beginning, with its glib exposition that smacks of romantic comedy, Greenberg reverses our narrative expectations and spins a psychologically astute, compelling study of narcissistic delusion—his version of "The Heiress," in which the payoff is not revenge but revelation about the stranglehold of symbiosis. The title, "The American Plan," is an ironic reference to the hotel's eating arrangements, which include three square meals a day. The play, however, is about greed of an altogether different kind: financial, psychic, and sexual.

As the plot unfolds, both Lili and Nick are shown to be wounded, ruthless, voracious souls who seek in each other some kind of magical deliverance. Lili presents herself as a passive, self-dramatizing victim. Within minutes of their first meeting, she is pointing Eva out from the dock. "That looming, late-Ibsenesque figure with the Mah Jong tiles," she says, adding, "She's really a dreadful woman." Lili nurses a grievance against her mother that, in its exaggeration, is almost high camp: Eva is, according to Lili, the "murderer" of Lili's father and an anti-Semitic, serial tuft hunter, whose conquests include Himmler and Miës van der Rohe. Eva, Lili tells Nick, is "holding me captive here" in the family summer house.

Lili is so attractive, her wit so quirky, her intelligence so charming that her story seems plausible. It's hard for Nick or for us, at first, to register the extent of her hysteria. At the end of the opening scene, however, a hint of her desperation shows through. "Please—would you please—come see me sometimes? There's no one—I don't speak to anyone—and they're—they're very stern with me," she says, suddenly grabbing him and kissing him, before being led away to tea with Mom by her black maid and companion, Olivia (Brenda Pressley). In Lili's mind, Nick is the knight who will slay her dragon-mother and rescue her from her Central Park dungeon, which she describes variously as "the river Styx" and, conjuring up a Miltonic Hell, "darkness visible." The paradise of Lili's childhood has been lost; "The American Plan" is about her attempt to re-create it in another relationship. Her histrionic account of the depredations of her life—"I frighten everyone," she says—turns her inconsolability into martyrdom, which, to a narcissist like Nick, is honey to the bee. "I cause happiness," he tells Eva later, after apparently dropping his fiancée for Lili. "That's what I do." He may be lying to Lili about his past, but Lili, daydreaming of an idyllic universe of two, is lying to herself as well. "He's a prince," she tells Olivia, adding, "He's plunged himself into a journey of matrimonial intent. Fearlessly, he's scaled the mighty Catskills. . . . Nicky's asked me to marry him."

As Lili, Rabe manages to be at once fragile and fanatic. She is a cunning actor, blessed with a deep, compelling voice whose authority powerfully registers all the mercurial half notes of acerbity and panic; here she is pitch-perfect and distinguished. The seductiveness of her sound and the alertness of her mind successfully mask her character's disturbed aggression. "She used to sing, 'The Nazis haven't found us, but darling they're around us,' " Lili tells Olivia of her mother. To which the unamused Olivia, the voice of objectivity, answers, "You were born difficult. A difficult girl." This is important news, which never finds its way into Lili's story of herself. We learn that as a child Lili frequently ran away from home, that she has had a couple of breakdowns, that she dropped out of Sarah Lawrence—a history of collapse, which she brushes off with a joke. "Pre-occupational" is her droll answer to Nick's question about what she does. If Lili's litany of grievances doesn't immediately give away her co-dependent relationship with Eva, the ambivalence in her body language does. (Lili's scenes with Eva mostly take place over tea, where Eva is literally and figuratively "the host," feeding the parasitic Lili.) With her torso turned away from the table, Lili sits reading; she is a sort of bodacious Bartleby, who keeps Eva company and, at the same time, rejects her offers of nurture. "I don't need anything. Thank you," Lili says. "I'd rather not be asked." Eva tells her, "All we are here for—all we want—Olivia and I—is for our girl to be happy again." Lili uses her unhappiness to attack her mother's patronizing well-being. "I am," she counters sullenly. "Drunk with it."

As Ruehl wittily plays her, with frowsy black bangs and lips set in a sardonic straight line, Eva is a canny monster, a funny, selfish force of nature. From her opening riff, it's clear that she talks *at* people, rather than with them. She enjoys performing her superiority; she turns Lili and Olivia into sounding boards and sidekicks. Her displays of infantilizing care and her seductive self-centeredness are as confounding to her child as they are to the audience. In Eva's defense, Olivia tells Lili, "Your mother was a woman alone. She gave you nice things. Good schools. She made her way. That was not easy." Eva, who claims to have been on the last boat out of Nazi Germany, is a tough piece of work, and Ruehl nails both her sinew and her sadism. Eva exposes Nick as a gold-digging fraudster while explaining the real state of Lili's finances (she won't come into her inheritance until she's thirty-five); then, having burst his bubble, she offers to bankroll him, with one proviso. "If you will tell her, she will tell me; if she will tell me, I will renege," she says. But the next time that Eva, Nick, and Lili are together it's Eva who blurts out the news; Lili promptly faints.

Just who is playing whom here, and why? The arrival of another apparent fortune hunter, Gil Harbison (Austin Lysy), allows Greenberg to ratchet up the unspoken sadomasochistic tug of war between mother and daughter. Gil is indeed looking to make a match, but with Nick, his old flame, not Lili, and he will not be denied. Although Greenberg's dramaturgy falters a bit at the finale, which jumps forward ten years to after Eva's death, the psychology of the piece still sustains and scintillates. Lili is about to come into her inheritance—which includes a psychic legacy of unhappiness. She is forever haunted by her mother, without whom she can have no life and no separation. Sounds of protest on the street outside indicate that the world is changing, but Lili isn't. She still inhabits both her mother's elegant town house and the same infantile internal space, fulfilling the hate-filled destiny that Eva predicted for her: "An intricately unhappy life, I'm afraid, lived out in compensatory splendor." ♦

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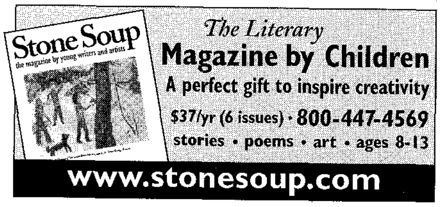
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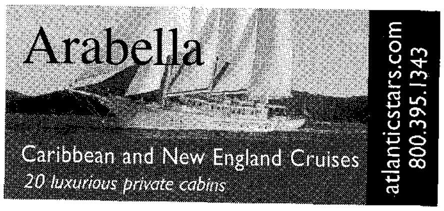
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The affordable art of concertgoing.

BY ALEX ROSS

The image of the classical concert hall as a playground for the rich is planted deep in the cultural psyche. When Hollywood filmmakers set a scene at the symphony, twits in evening wear fill the frame, their jaws tight and their noses held high. The monocle returns to fashion for the first time since the death of Erich von Stroheim. One day, an intrepid art director will come to a concert and discover that the classical audience is well populated by schoolteachers, proofreaders, students, retirees, and others with no entry in the *Social Register*. They can afford to attend because classical events aren't nearly as expensive as most people assume, especially in comparison with the extravagant pricing schemes for élite pop acts. (Prince infamously charged more than three thousand dollars a seat for a series of shows in 2007; standing room was a mere three hundred.) The cheapest seats at the Metropolitan Opera are fifteen dollars, slightly more than the bleachers at Yankee Stadium. Chamber-music concerts at the Frick, the Met Museum, Tully Hall, and Bargemusic are in the twenty-to-fifty-dollar range; most new-music events go for ten to twenty. Concerts at churches and music schools are usually free. Students can get in to the New York Philharmonic for the price of a movie.

How much music can you see for a hundred dollars? In the second week of January, I decided to find out, looking for the cheapest available tickets.

My first stop was the Family Circle, the uppermost balcony of the Met. From that lofty perch, fifty-five feet above the orchestra level, I took in the company's new productions of Massenet's "Thaïs," with Renée Fleming and Thomas Hampson, and Puccini's "La Rondine," with Angela Gheorghiu and Roberto Alagna. For "Thaïs," I had a partial-view box seat on the right side. I could tell that Fleming had entered when I heard a flurry of oohs and ahs on my left. As a rule, you come to the Family Circle not to see or to be seen but to listen. If you arrive in gym clothes or leave your shirt untucked, no one will smirk. The intermission chatter is generally smarter than it is in the socialite sectors. A few avid fans carry vocal scores. One night, a young operagoer confidently announced—a week before the announcement was made—that George Steel would take over New York City Opera.

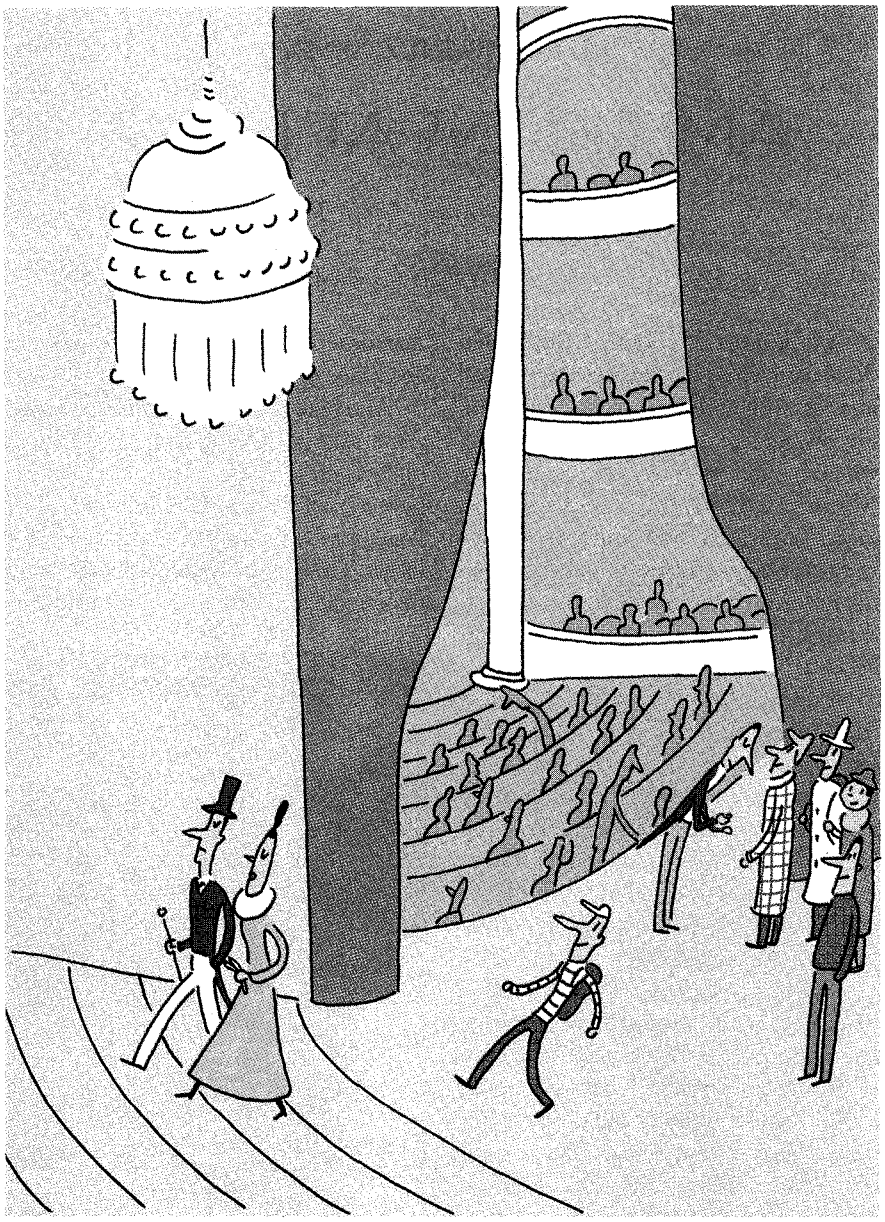
You may not be able to see much, but you can certainly hear. Down on the parterre level, where the critics sit, the orchestra dominates, and smaller-voiced singers are in danger of being drowned out. Up in the Family Circle, the sound has excellent balance and presence: the voices float straight up, bounce off the ceiling, and mingle cleanly with the orchestra. There's a primal thrill in hearing Fleming's soprano—still secure and plush, despite the stylistic mannerisms of recent years—retain its allure across a distance of a hundred and fifty feet. At the same time, the acoustic can mercilessly expose a singer's flaws. I've never been a fan of Alagna's tenor, and in "La Rondine" he sounded woefully dry and pinched—almost worthy of a boo or two. When there's booing at the Met, it usually emanates from the Family Circle.

The equivalent bargain at the New York Philharmonic is the open rehearsal. Periodically, the orchestra sells tickets to a rehearsal, at a price of sixteen dollars. Usually, the orchestra plays the program straight through, although some conductors make last-minute adjustments. (At the Boston Symphony, patrons have been known to complain when James Levine ventures to rehearse during the rehearsal.) On a Thursday morning at the Philharmonic, I saw the young French conductor Ludovic Morlot lead Debussy's "La Mer," Tristan Murail's 1980 work "Gondwana," Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 11, and Messiaen's "Oiseaux Exotiques," the last two with Olli Mustonen as the soloist. The Murail—a richly layered pandemonium of a score, in which the orchestra is regularly subdivided into a hundred separate strands—was strong stuff for 10 A.M., and the audience seemed a little nonplussed. But Morlot, a leader with a clear beat and a precise ear, succeeded in bringing out the secret sensuality of Murail's hyper-complex language. The composer, who was present, won an enthusiastic smattering of applause when he went to the podium to discuss a few unresolved issues.

The audience at the Philharmonic might be described as hard-core classical: mostly people fifty and older. Later that day, a different crowd showed up to see the singer, songwriter, and composer Gabriel Kahane perform at Le Poisson Rouge, the lively Greenwich Village club that mixes classical music with other genres. Kahane is twenty-seven, and his listeners seem roughly the same age. He is well on his way to developing an original creative personality; his music absorbs everything from nineteen-twenties neoclassicism to bluegrass and modern indie pop, with potent melodies bridging the disparate styles. In league with a six-piece ensemble called yMusic, Kahane presented his song cycle "For the Union Dead," on poems of Robert Lowell. The texts challenged Kahane's knack for teasing singable lines out of complex language; at times, the music seemed verbally overstuffed. But in a setting of "The Drinker" Kahane hit a vein of desolate beauty, dwelling obsessively on the phrase "foundering down." His greatest asset is his sonorous, mesmerizing baritone; he brings to mind Sinatra in his wee-small-hours mood. Sinatra, of course, would have charged more than ten dollars.

At free concerts, the stereotype of the classical audience falls apart completely. This was true in 1891, when the Met orchestra appeared at Cooper Union and attracted, according to the *Times*, "people of all shades of complexion, religion, race, and age." And it was true the other day when three recent graduates of Juilliard—the violinist Amy Schroeder, the cellist Andrew Yee, and the pianist Jonathan Coombs—presented a lunchtime program of Beethoven's Trio Opus 1, No. 1 and Brahms's Trio No. 1 in the lobby of 180 Maiden Lane, a commercial tower near the South Street Seaport. (Juilliard regularly sends out students to perform at this unlikely locale; it's a welcome gesture from an institution that is working to overcome its insular reputation.) The interpretation was as polished as you'd expect from Juilliard players, and rather more unbuttoned and soulful. The crowd, which maxed out at fifty people during the first movement of the Brahms, was a cross-section of city types: a young Asian woman, glancing through memos; a middle-aged man in a yarmulke, sipping a Diet Wild Cherry Pepsi; a young black man in a flat-bill Yankees cap, sitting with his girlfriend; a Hispanic deliveryman for Europa Café, listening with his head in his hands. A fortyish white man in business attire hovered on the edge of the scene, a look of confusion on his face, as if he were witnessing a surrealist provocation, which, in a way, he was.

The idea of music as a kind of visitation from the beyond is, of course, central to the church tradition, where the tones of organs and choirs become emblems of God's power. These days, New York churches offer short concerts not to overawe nonbelievers but simply to open an avenue to contemplation. Grace Church, in the Village, holds weekday "organ meditations," featuring the music of Bach. And visitors can drop by St. Mary the Virgin—a French Gothic structure on West Forty-sixth Street, between Rosie O'Grady's and a Comfort Inn—to bask in the variously brilliant, dusky, and granitic sound of the church's 1932 Aeolian-Skinner organ, one of the finest instruments in the city. Before a Tuesday-evening service, I heard a brief recital that included Buxtehude's chorale prelude "Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern." Shimmeringly varied timbres, evocative of starlight, made me want to know more about the player, who was listed as James Kennerley. He turned out to be a bespectacled British lad, aged twenty-four, a Cambridge graduate and a former organ scholar at St. Paul's Cathedral. He was appointed music director of St. Mary's last month.



You can get a seat at the Metropolitan Opera for as little as fifteen dollars.

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

"I'm incredibly happy to have this instrument," Kennerley told me, seated at the console. "It has this fantastic range of sounds, from high stops to reedy French *trompettes* to the colossal bass"—he pressed a low C with his foot, frightening a few tourists in the nave below—"and it takes on great beauty in the height and width of this space." While I looked on, he let loose a fast-figured, at times piercingly dissonant improvisation, with reposeful tonal chords to close. There are many other similarly gifted musicians at churches around the city; they exemplify a fairly large population for whom musical life is not a pursuit of international fame but almost a kind of grass-roots activism, with aesthetic rather than political transformation as the goal.

Later in the week, I attended an immaculately rehearsed free concert by Ensemble ACJW, a group of élite young players, at Juilliard; an impressively harsh avant-garde violin happening by Tony Conrad and Genesis P-Orridge, at Issue Project Room, in Brooklyn; and an introspective piano recital by Alon Goldstein, part of the low-priced Peoples' Symphony series, at Town Hall. Despite the limited budget, I didn't feel I'd missed much; if anything, ten events in seven days was overdoing it. All in all, I spent eighty-one dollars. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

AMERICANS AT LARGE

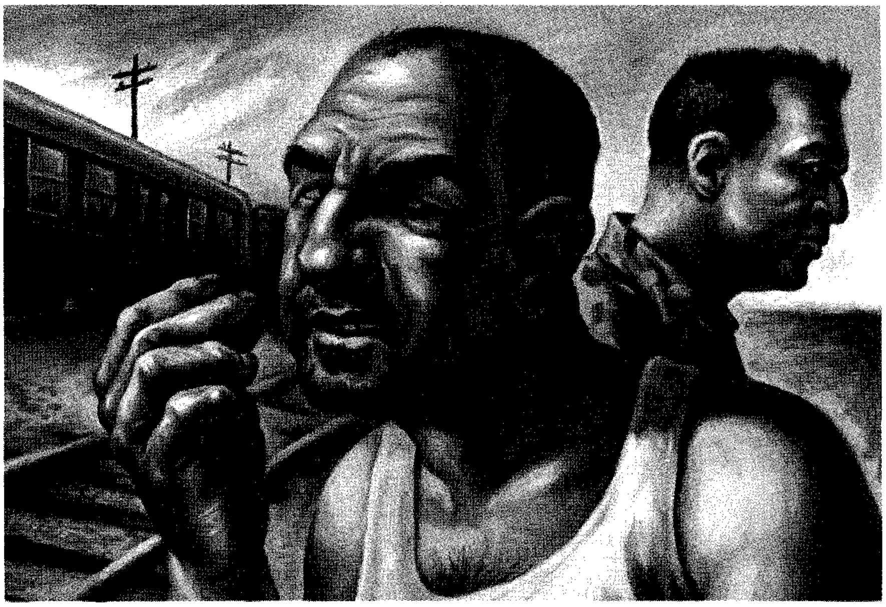
"California Dreamin'" and "Taken."

BY ANTHONY LANE

On August 25, 2006, a Romanian named Cristian Nemescu was killed in a car crash at the age of twenty-seven. He was returning from an editing suite, where he had been working on a cut of "California Dreamin'." This was Nemescu's first feature as a director, and we will never know exactly how the finished film would have looked; the regret, though deep, is not all-consuming, because "California Dreamin'" bears almost no trace of the tyro. It could use a trim, but only rarely does it strain for effect, and, for a young man, Nemescu was uncannily versed in the emotions of middle age—free-floating rancor, the creak of unhelpful wisdom, and a covetous sigh at the spectacle of lust. If it's regret you want, don't mourn the director; just watch his movie.

The year is 1999, during the conflict in Kosovo, and the place is Constanta, Romania, on the Black Sea. A platoon of American marines has arrived with a shipment of military radar, to be deployed near the Serbian border in support of air raids by the NATO coalition. The plan is to put the equipment on a train and escort it across Romania: hardly an errand to perplex the guy in charge, Captain Jones (Armand Assante). That's what *he* thinks. On a sleepy summer's day, the train grinds into a railroad station in the village of Capalnita, at the back end of nowhere, to be met by the devil incarnate. His name is Doiaru (Razvan Vasilescu), he is the stationmaster, and, like all the best Beelzebubs, he doesn't look the part. With his lined and grizzled face, poised to crease into a smile, he could be the gentlest of patriarchs; but the man is a beast, who has built up a black market, terrorized the other villagers, and brought a nearby factory to its knees. He loves his daughter Monica (Maria Dinulescu), a sullen beauty of seventeen, but his love—or, as she sees it, his dread of being alone—vents itself as a fearsome wish to control. No wonder she longs to cut loose.

And here comes her chance: a herd of American boys, as dazed and horny as bullocks in the wrong pasture. They expect a brief halt, instead of which they linger for five days and browse among the locals. This is because Doiaru uncouples the engine and demands customs documentation, which nobody seems able to provide. Single-handed, in other words, he blocks the progress of American might, and why? A succession of haunting flashbacks to his own boyhood, in the Second World War, when he waited for Allied help that never came, suggests a possible cause, but Vasilescu's earthy performance tells of something more stubbornly rooted: a force of ill will, which cannot abide the good will of others. The irony is that, in stopping the train, he sets off a burst of everything he loathes: friendship, zeal, and the fireworks of desire. The mayor of Capalnita, spotting a chance to put his little kingdom on the map, invites the troops to a barbecue party, where he wears a Stars and Stripes tie. We even get an Elvis impersonator, crooning "Love Me Tender" in a Romanian burr. There is nothing new, of course, in the comedy of the backwater that gets swamped by the mainstream, or by a gush of good fortune, but even films as winning as "Whisky Galore!" or "Local Hero" didn't dare to propose that the backwater itself might be corrupted and crazed with boredom, whereas one father in Capalnita tells his son to flee to Bucharest and threatens to break his legs if he ever comes back. When Captain Jones takes the stage at a village meeting, at the mayor's request, he describes the place as paradise. The elders applaud, but you know what their juniors would say.



Razvan Vasilescu and Armand Assante face off in a Romanian village.

OWEN SMITH

So busily, and wittily, does Nemescu show these characters striking their various political attitudes (there is a hapless intrusion from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) that the film has no time to get locked into an attitude of its own. What it has, instead, is an appetite for human quiddity, and an eye for those fleeting shocks in which cultures strike and rebound. To this extent, it is Monica, not her father, who is at the movie's heart; having conceived a passion for Jones's handsome deputy, Sergeant McLaren (Jamie Elman), she gets an English-speaking classmate—who happens to adore her—to interpret the bashful endearments that she and the sergeant wish to trade. The result is a masterly, international update of the Cyrano situation. ("I would like to kiss you" is translated as

"He wants to know what kind of music you listen to.") On the one hand, Monica is impetuous to the point of brusque; when that kiss comes, his lips draw near for a tentative peck, and she practically jumps down his throat. On the other hand, taking a cue from Nemescu, she is wise beyond her years, and fully aware that McLaren is not an escape route but a midsummer crush. At the end, with the train finally set to leave, he begs her to write her phone number on his hand; having watched her recede into the night, he opens his palm, and finds that she has scrawled a childish sun. She has loved him tender, but let him go; the whole film, you might say—raunchy and delicate, endlessly alive to the dashing of hope—is a study in arrivals and departures. Hurrying back to the village, Monica finds it in uproar, with her father under attack. If ever the Americans were needed, now is the time; but Jones and his men are gone.

The conundrum posed by "Taken" is as old as cinema itself. Do stars degrade themselves when they take a role in trash, or does their very presence redeem the folly, turning up something that glitters amid the dross? A trenchcoated Robert Mitchum, for instance, sauntered through the villainous Europe of "Foreign Intrigue" (1956), but his saunter is pretty much all that remains; the rest of the movie was forgettable to start with. Now we have another looming hulk, Liam Neeson, laying similar waste to a posse of un-American scoundrels. Like Mitchum, Neeson has shoulders so wide that you have to inspect the back of his jacket to make sure that he didn't leave the coat hanger in. Like Mitchum, too, he appears to move slowly, at his noble leisure, yet to act with daunting swiftness when the occasion demands. He is more alert than Mitchum, whose brand of cool verged on the narcoleptic, but both men lord it over their surroundings—not with a wink but with a bang. Why spoof the world when you can wreck it with a straight face?

In "Taken," Neeson plays a former C.I.A. hand named Bryan Mills, who is divorced from his wife (Famke Janssen) and living in Los Angeles to be near his daughter Kim (Maggie Grace). If there's one thing we've learned from "California Dreamin'," it's that seventeen-year-old daughters get into scrapes. And if there's one thing we've learned from "24" it's that anybody named Kim, with a father schooled in dirty work by the U.S. government, will have a large echo chamber where her brain is meant to be. Kim and a friend leave for a vacation in Europe, where, ignoring the advice of her father, they are abducted with such consummate speed that it might have been simpler if he had FedExed them directly to the kidnappers. Pausing only to borrow a private jet from his ex's slimy husband, Mills flies to Paris, where he proceeds to work his way, without mercy, through a personal alphabet of undesirable aliens. This being a brisk affair, of little more than ninety minutes, he gets only as far as Albanians and Arabs, but, if I were an innocent Bermudan, let alone a Belgian, I would be starting to get nervous about a sequel.

The producer and co-writer is Luc Besson, and the director is Pierre Morel, who made the superior "District B13." That had Paris under its fingernails, whereas "Taken" darts from one location to the next without probing the city that lies between the hot spots, although Neeson would argue that, once you learn to drive like a Parisian, the opportunities for sightseeing tend to flash past. His performance is the most perturbing thing in the film, even more so than its electrical-torture sequence or its revelations about sex-trafficking; Mills, like some older, vaster brother of Daniel Craig's James Bond, seems driven to—or, increasingly, driven by—acts of vengeance that are only obliquely related to the wrong that is being avenged. The chop and swipe of his forearms, with or without a knife, become as mechanical as the hammer blows of a blacksmith, and the point at which he casually shoots a friend's wife (who has invited him to stay for supper), in order to extract information from the friend, is either proof of Mills's own madness or, at best, a thoughtful critique of the decline in domestic French cuisine. True, the friend has turned out to be false, but that in itself is a startling development, with Morel and Besson presumably happy to present their native land as not merely spiced with imported peril but intrinsically treacherous. Someone, no doubt, is already composing a thesis on "Symbolic paranoia and American foreign policy in mid-period Neeson," and you do wonder how this commanding actor—who carries so much more conviction than the plot—felt about delivering the line "I'll tear down the Eiffel Tower if I have to." The movie opened in France almost a year ago; was it wise to delay its release here until the dawn of the new Presidency, when it so clearly belongs to the last one? ♦

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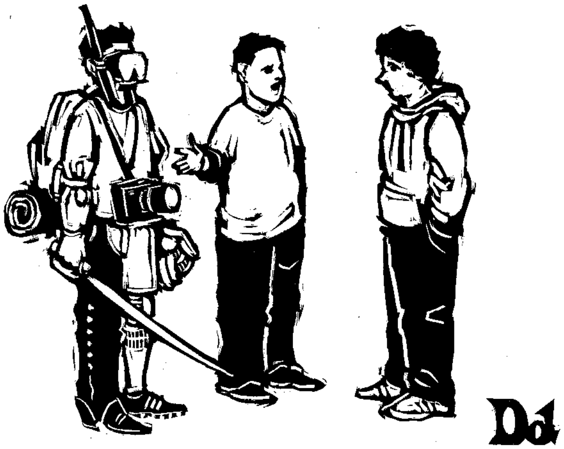
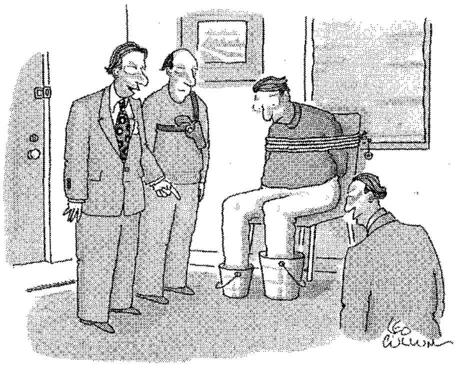
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Zachary Kanin, must be received by Sunday, February 1st. Finalists in the January 19th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 23rd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"In this economy, you have to let the vacation come to you."
Michael Soskis, Cambridge, Mass.



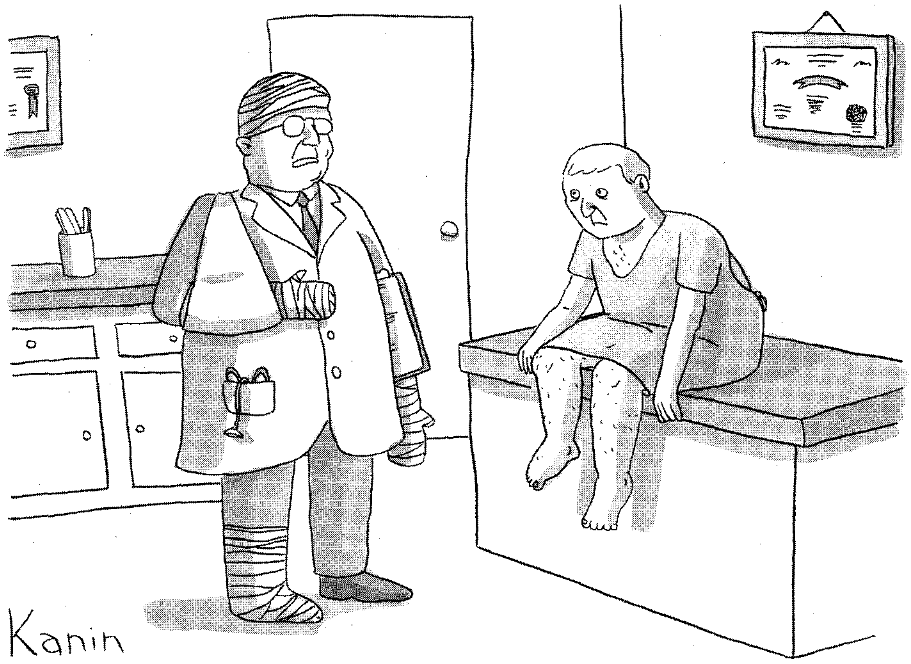
THE FINALISTS

"It's sloppy work like that that gives the mob a bad name."
Gordon Baumbacher, Kentfield, Calif.

"We are trying to reduce our concrete footprint."
Tim Wilcox, Milwaukee, Wis.

"Two weeks ago, this was not considered torture."
Avery Clapsadde, Neche, N.D.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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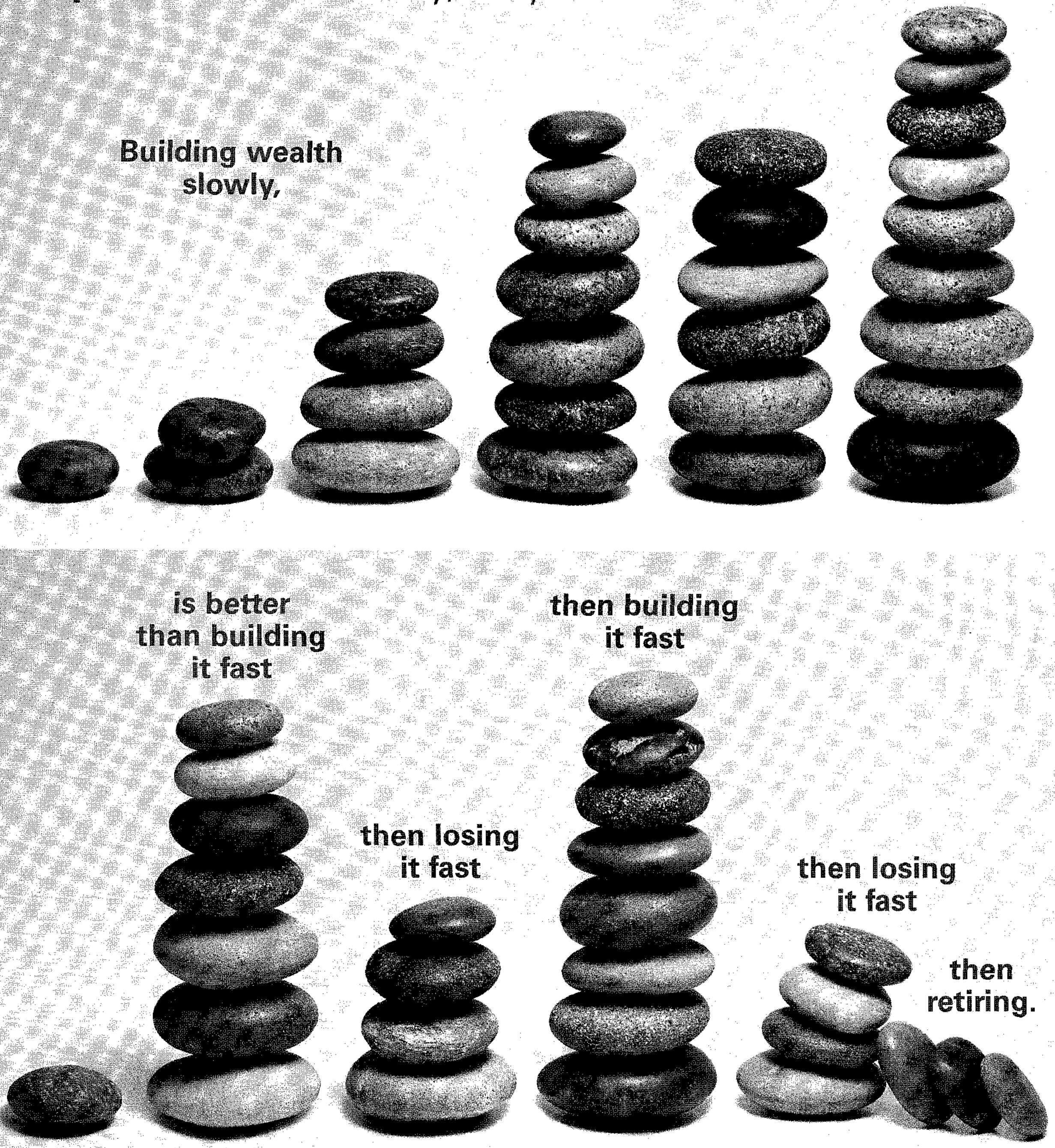
Simple Truth: Start early, stay the course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then building it fast
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